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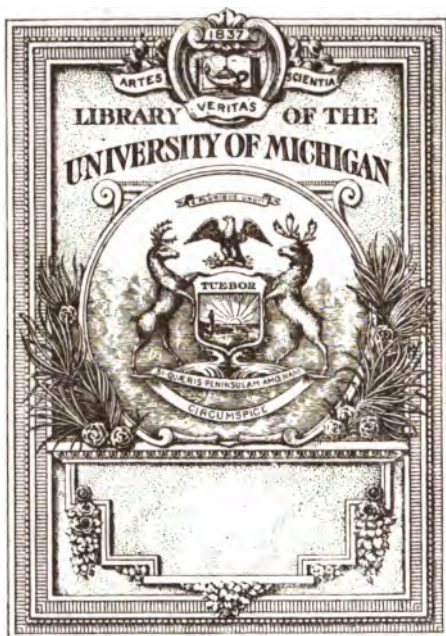
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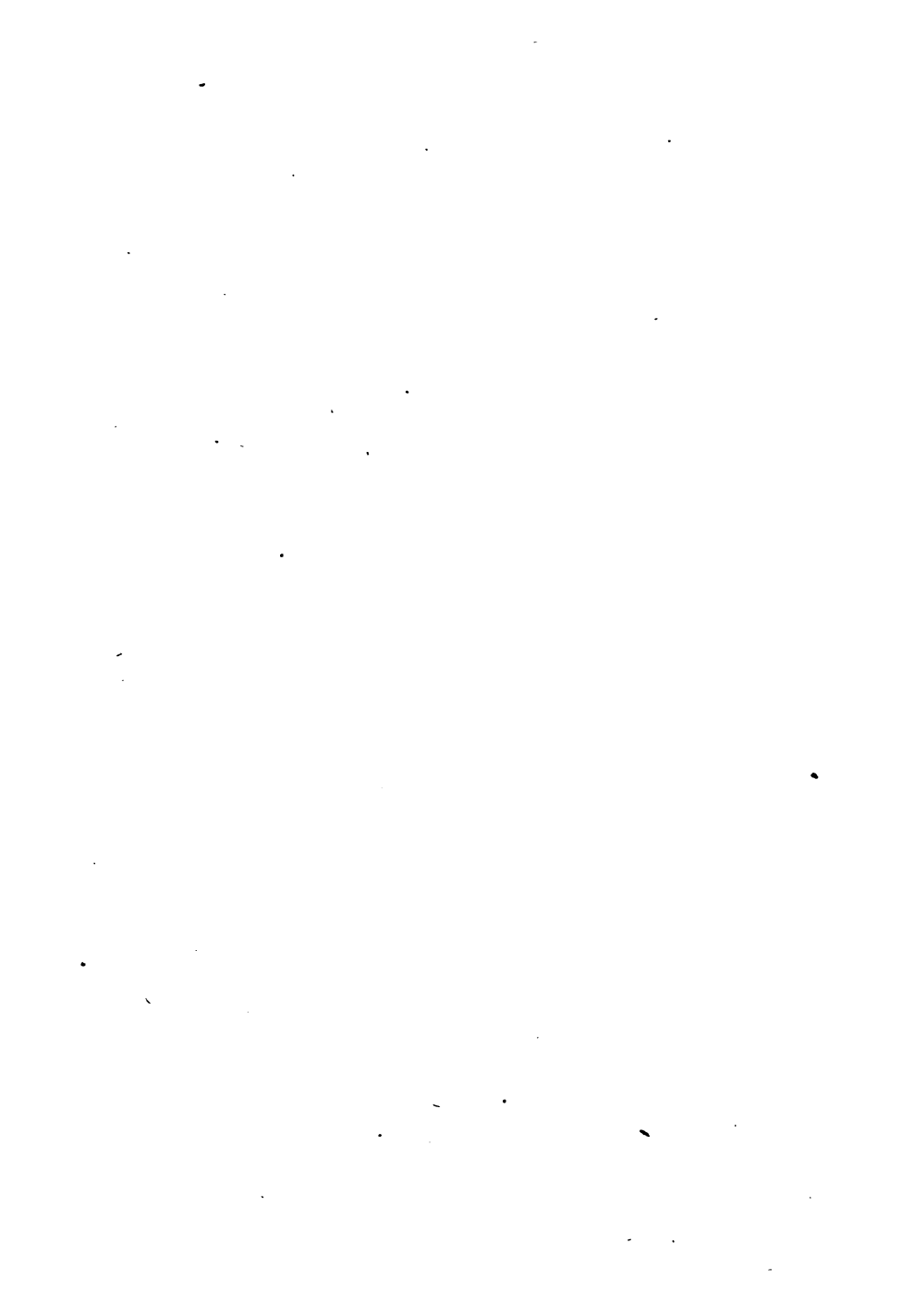
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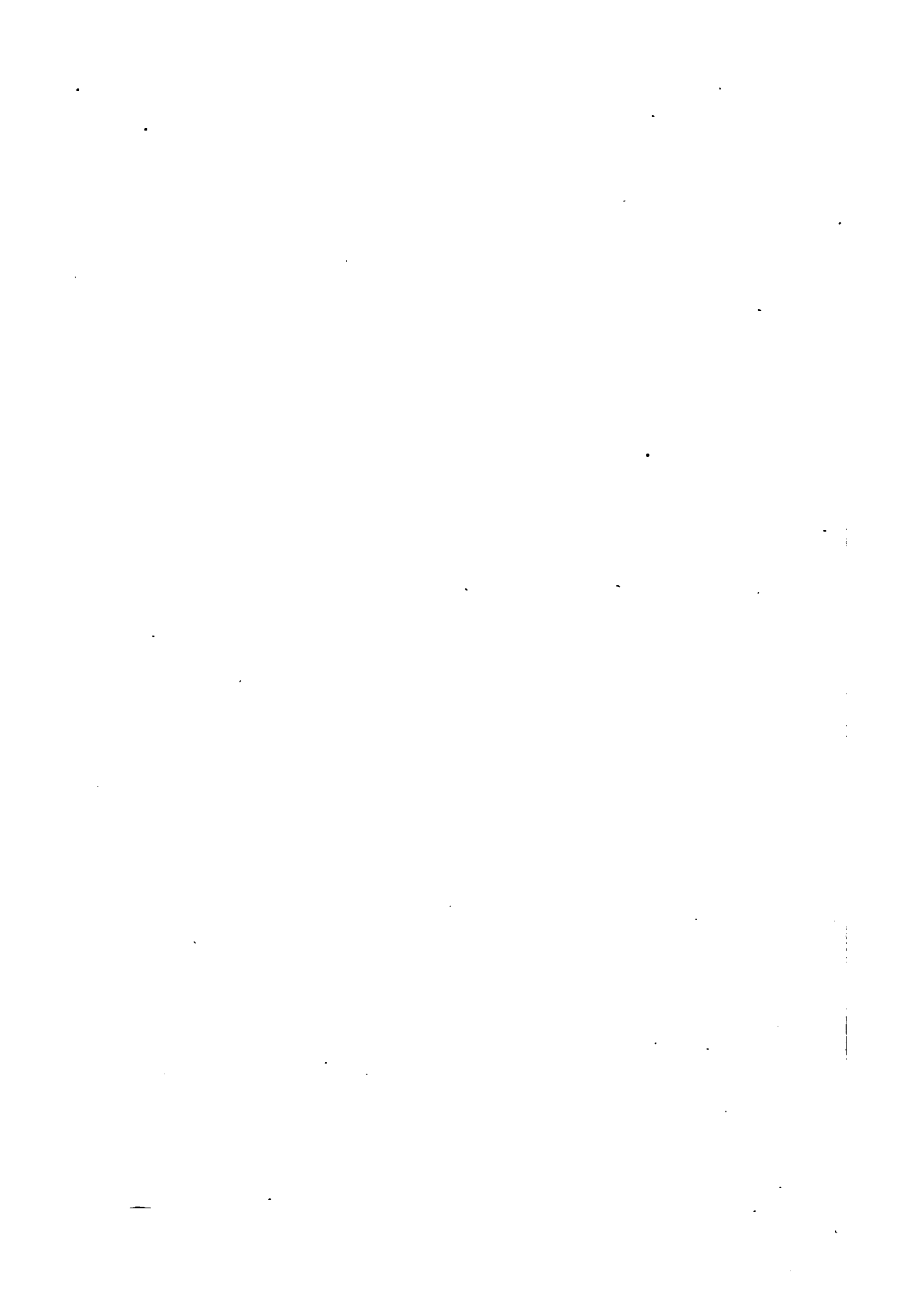
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# THE HEART OF A MAID





Lovell's International Series, No. 155.

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# THE HEART OF A MAID



BY

BEATRICE KIPLING

*Gift*

*1911*

*Authorized Edition*

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JOHN W. LOVELL COMPANY

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# THE HEART OF A MAID.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A RIDE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

“Who knows what days I answer for to-day?  
Giving the bud, I give the flower.”

A. MEYNELL.

RAIN had fallen heavily all day, and Simla had been shrouded in dense grey cloud : nothing to see, nothing to breathe, only damp and discomfort to feel, and the pouring rain to hear. A depressing day—a day to make most people feel vaguely cross and uncomfortable, and to cause the more sensitive to regret the past, dislike the present, and distrust the future.

Towards evening the rain stopped, the clouds dispersed, and the clear blue sky, spanned in the east by one great arch of rainbow, showed vividly against the fresh-washed green of the hills, and hearts grew light again. It is a little humi-

liating to think how very much the weather and the conditions of the atmosphere have to do with our feelings; but while bodies contain souls, and the spiritual has power over the physical, so long must we submit to the ruling of outside influences.

The evening became more beautiful when the soft bright glow that only sunset gives shone on the Simla pines and the barren summits of the more distant hills, while the cicadas shrieked in the trees, making the air hum and simmer with sound. Riding slowly along a narrow road, one of the least frequented in Simla, were a girl and a young man, in earnest talk. The girl was pretty, though at that moment she hardly looked so, for her face was flushed and her mouth worked nervously; her companion, a small man with neat insignificant features, was leaning towards her, and speaking in a low voice.

"It can't be a surprise to you, May! For Heaven's sake don't say that you have misunderstood me all this time! I told you last year that, though you refused me then, I could never forget you, and should try my fate again, and hope for better luck."

"Yes, I remember ; but I hoped you had forgotten ? " said May Trent, very softly.

"Forgotten ! If I had forgotten, do you think I should have sought you, and hung about you all these months as I have been doing. I tried to forget you in the winter, I own, and found it hopelessly impossible, and then I came back to you. Surely you won't make me miserable again, darling ? "

Percy Anstruther was a rising young man in the Bengal Civil Service, who had proposed to May a year ago, and taken her answer very quietly. A man generally says, "Let this make no difference between us : let us be friends," after a refusal, but only one in ten keeps his word, and it is natural he should dislike or grow indifferent to a girl who does not wish him to love her.

Anstruther could not teach himself to dislike May, or to be indifferent to her, and they were certainly never friends ; he was very quiet and reserved, and love meant more to him than it does to many people. May felt vaguely, even when he played the part of friend most carefully, that she had not seen the last of him as a lover, but she had let matters go as they would,

neither hindering nor helping them, and now she regretted her want of decision.

"What can I say that will be different from last time?" she said, her eyes filling with tears. "It is cruel of you to make me give you and myself all this pain again! You know that I don't love you!" Then, noticing the change in his face, she added quickly, "Oh! don't look like that! Please don't; I can't bear it. You force me to hurt you! I don't love anybody in the way you want; I don't think I ever shall. I must be a stone—I'm not worth caring for."

"Only give me a chance: let me try and teach you to love me, darling," said Anstruther, hopefully. "Your love will be all the better worth having, when I win it, for not coming quickly. I shall win it: trust me. It is not in nature—it can't be!—that such love as mine for you is to be wasted. Won't you trust me? I how I could make you happy. I feel that I know you so well—while for me it would change and glorify my whole life."

May unconsciously drew her reins tighter and tighter till her horse tossed its head uneasily, and there was a long pause.

She had been very romantic once, but life

had not fitted itself to her ideals, and now she was trying to shape her ideals to real life as she thought it was, and found the task difficult. The one conclusion she had arrived at was that duty, not love or happiness, was the great fact of existence, and with the exaggeration of youth, she felt herself called upon at twenty years of age to take up the burden of life. If she had been better educated she would have thrown herself, heart and soul, into some occupation, called it her Life's Work, and used capitals when she wrote of it, but she was not clever and had spent two years in India. Now two years spent anywhere with Mrs. Trent would have been enough to convince a not very strong-minded girl that marriage was the only possible career to look forward to, and in India this idea takes root with peculiar rapidity. May had made up her mind to do her duty by marrying the first suitable man that asked her, but deciding and doing are as different as wishing and having, and when the time for performance came, her resolve was very difficult to carry out.

Between May and her mother there was very little sympathy, a result probably of their never

having lived together until the girl was eighteen. When mother and daughter—comparative strangers, having scarcely met since the latter's early childhood—are put to the test of living together, without the links of custom to bind them, disagreement, even constant quarrelling, is too often the result. This is one of the many evils of Anglo-Indian life, and it is an evil which reaches far; for the enforced separation of parent and child, the alienation of years cannot be done away with in a few months, and half the hasty, ill-assorted marriages that take place have for a cause the fact that the girl was not happy at home.

Mrs. Trent was very fond of her daughter and very proud of her, but they did not agree well; every day countless little things occurred to irritate them. Each with the sincerest desire to be amiable, and neither of them ill-tempered by nature, they still found, when together, that there came the trifling jar and fret, more hurtful to love than open quarrelling.

May and her mother were alone together at Simla, for Major Trent, hard worked and hard working, was toiling in the plains—too useful to be spared for rest and holiday.



Mrs. Trent was neither unkind nor mercenary, but she was a sensible woman, and intended May and Eva, her second daughter, who was still at school, to marry before it was necessary to decide what to do with the three boys at home. Of course Major Trent was not well off—who is in these latter days in India?—and the cares of his family weighed heavily on him. May knew this—knew too what was expected of her—but still she hesitated.

The crimson clouds were paling as the dusk drew in, and the hum of the cicadas had given place to a great silence; it seemed to her that they two stood alone between earth and heaven, and she forced herself to speak openly.

“Tell me what I should say. You know me better than anyone does. I am not happy at home; you have seen that. My parents think that they have been good to me long enough, that it is my bounden duty to get married, and let Eva come out and have her turn. That’s about the bitterest feeling a girl can have,” she said, breathing as quickly as though she were sobbing, “that her father and mother would gladly give her to any man who would take the trouble to support her.” He did not speak, and she went on, excited by her own words.

"I shall regret having said this to-morrow, and be very much ashamed of it, but I will speak plainly for once. My mother was angry with me for refusing you last year, and said that, as I cared for no one else, I should end by caring for you. Now I know you better than I did, but my feelings for you are unchanged. How can you ask me to marry you?"

"It sounds hopeless, but I am not easily frightened. Remember you are excited now and are saying more than you mean. Oh I can't you trust me, May? I am some ten years older than you, and I do not speak thoughtlessly. You must realize by this time that my love for you is not a mere fancy, and you say yourself you are not happy at home."

"I may look on you merely as a means of escape, then?"

"As you will: I trust very much to time. You will love me some day, and if the whole strength of my nature can influence you, that some day will come quickly. Don't think of my wishes, May: think of yourself and your own feelings, and then tell me if you will marry me."

May had unwittingly worked herself into a state of revolt against her father and mother,

and the life she had led for the last two years ; sooner or later most girls feel, for a time at least, that anything is better than what they have, and this feeling suddenly possessed her. Men would not be flattered if it were explained to them how often they are accepted merely because the world has become monotonous and a new sensation is precious ; luckily, these explanations are impossible. Then, too, it seemed an easy way of making a man happy, only to say a few words. It did not strike her clearly at that moment that those few words would pledge her to him, body and soul. The great grey hills were very vast and solemn in the dim light ; looking at them she felt dwarfed, and of no importance : they had stood and would stand for centuries. What did her insignificant little life matter, after all, how spent, or with whom ? It was all so small and contemptible. This man wanted her as no one else did ; it would be change at any rate.

“Yes, I will marry you,” she said quietly ; then, to her great surprise, she felt his arm round her, and as he kissed her she realized what she had done. For a moment she was passive, her cheek against his, wondering how

best she might retract her words. But now she had given her promise; it must be irrevocable.

To make up for this good resolution, she spurred her horse and freed herself from Anstruther.

"Not out of doors, please," she said, laughing nervously; "it's too absurd! And look how the dusk is closing in: we must make great haste."

She would have hurried on as she spoke, but Anstruther laid a hand on her horse's bridle.

"Call me 'Percy' first, just once, and then we'll go as quick as you like."

This request and the voice in which it was spoken seemed to her very foolish, and she replied with feelings of mingled impatience and hypocrisy: "Very well, then; please come, Percy; I shall get a scolding," and she started off in a hand gallop.

Hastening round a corner they nearly came into collision with two other riders—a small, slight girl and a broad-shouldered man, whose horses were very near together.

"Are you racing, dear?" called out the girl, in a high sweet voice, but May did not answer or draw rein till they reached the steep little path that led down to Tregarven Cottage. She

tried to dismount unaided, but in her haste her habit caught, and Anstruther helped her down, with an air of possessive tenderness that made her shiver.

"May I come in and speak to your mother now?"

"Please not; let me tell her first," begged May, longing to get away from him.

"Just as you like; only of course I'll write to your father to-night; I suppose you'll allow me to do that, darling?"

"Yes! And now good-night. Oh! you are hurting my hand so, crushing my rings right into it." And, as his grasp loosened she slipped her hand away, and made her escape indoors, calling out, "Good-night," as she went.

It was very undignified, but she felt she could not have endured the farewell that was impending. And Anstruther was not in a mood to take offence; he only thought complacently, "Poor little girl! how very shy she is."

## CHAPTER II.

## DIE JUST A LITTLE GIRL.

"That fawn-skin, dappled hair of hers,  
And the blue eye  
Dear and dewy,  
And that infantine fresh air of hers !"

R. BROWNING.

"NUMBERS 3, 5, 9, and the supper extras—you'll give me the supper extras, won't you, Miss Cracroft?"

"Oh, no! indeed I can't. What are you thinking of, Captain Ellis? Why, there are two of them, and I never give anyone more than four dances. That's one of my hard-and-fast rules, and I won't break it even for you?"

"Well, of course, if you say that, I'm afraid to appeal further; but you might think a little of the effect of your cruelty on me."

"Oh, you are so funny! Fancy calling it cruel! I'll give you the first supper extra if you like. But do tell me: do you really mind?—do you mean it? I'm sure you'd be dread-

fully tired of me, if I gave you three dances running, wouldn't you, now?"

Eddie Cracroft was always asking little questions, and she had a trick of looking up as she did so with appealing eyes and raised eyebrows. She was very small, short enough to have to look up at every man she talked to, which was in itself an advantage (men like being looked up to), and exceedingly slight. Many people raved about her beauty, but she was one of those girls who never photograph well. When asked for her portrait, as she often was, she looked pathetic and said: "Oh, I never give away a photo, I don't quite like to; besides, do you know I always come out so horridly! Dreadful things, all teeth and a yard or two of nose! It's quite true; you needn't laugh. Well, if you want to remember me, you can do it without a photo. You will, won't you?"

Spite of this, she had a complexion like milk and roses, large soft brown eyes, and honey-colored hair, and knew how to make the best of her defects. Her teeth were prominent, but the lips over them were always arranged in a sort of vague smile—as attractive to most men, as it was annoying to many women.

That was a peculiar thing about Edie. People were either very fond of her, or disliked her exceedingly; one wanted either to kiss her or to box her ears. When she did not charm, she irritated.

Dighton Ellis, of that well-known regiment, the Ineligibles, belonged to the large class of men who were charmed by Edie. He might indeed have been counted in the first rank of them; for in his eyes the little lady was perfect. He was a tall, square-shouldered young man, handsome, in a blunt-featured way, with an enviable moustache.

"Look! there's Mr. Anstruther. I haven't seen May Trent to-night, have you? I wonder if"—— (Here Anstruther came up to them, and Edie stopped speaking.) May, being tired, after the excitement of the afternoon, had preferred not to go to the dance that evening; but Anstruther had come, he hardly knew why, because it was something to do, and he had not felt able to settle quietly down to whist, his usual evening occupation.

"I wonder if I dare hope to find you with a waltz to give away at this hour, Miss Cra-croft?" he asked, falling into the tone of sham



gallantry in which men generally spoke to Edie.

"I never give away dances beforehand; I never care to. I think it's so dull, if one always knows beforehand just who one is going to dance with. I can give you either 4 or 7; they are both waltzes."

"Thank you, I'll have No. 4 then; shall I find you in this room?" And he passed on, to the vexation of Edie, who had meant him to take both dances.

"Do you know," she said, turning to Ellis, and speaking in her most confidential tone, "I'm perfectly sure something has happened."

"Will you go a chick on it, whatever it is?" suggested Ellis.

"I never bet; but I don't mind wagering my pet pearl pin," touching one she wore, "against a pair of long gloves, that they are engaged."

"Who?"

"May and Mr. Anstruther, of course."

"How can you tell?"

"Oh, I don't know. I'm sure of it, somehow. You'll see I'll get him to tell me."

Accordingly when Anstruther's dance with Edie came, she began at once on the subject which interested him most.

"I'm so cross," she said, shaking her shoulders, while they were resting after a few turns on a very crowded floor.

"I suppose I'm bound to believe you, but I should certainly never think so to look at you. Who is the offender?—not me, I hope."

"Oh, no! not you; it's May. She said she was going to be here. And then she never comes; it's much too bad of her. And I believe it is really your fault, Mr. Anstruther. Captain Ellis and I saw you having *such* a long ride this afternoon. I'm sure she's quite tired out."

It did not strike Anstruther that one girl rarely speaks to another at a dance, so the presence or absence of a friend can make very little difference, and he was pleased by Edie's anxiety. She had made up her mind to win her gloves.

"We rode no further than you did this afternoon, I think," he said.

"Well, you were going very much faster. I believe you had had a quarrel. Had you? Captain Ellis said he didn't think you had, and I was simply longing to know. I shall have to run over and ask May the first thing to-morrow morning, if you won't tell me now!"

"No; we had not been quarrelling—only talking very seriously."

"Oh! I wonder what about! I suppose I mustn't ask; but I do wish you'd tell me—do."

"What do you think is a serious thing to talk about?"

"I don't know—at least I couldn't say without thinking for such a long time. You know I'm not a bit clever, I only wish I was, like May; she is so clever, isn't she?"

This little bit of praise decided him. The music stopped, and they sat down in a quiet corner.

"But you haven't told me yet, Mr. Anstruther, had you been quarrelling with May? I don't think I shall ever forgive you if you have, for I'm sure it was all your fault."

"Of course it would have been; but luckily we are agreed: at any rate on one point, and that's a somewhat important one."

"Tell me what you mean really," said Edie, impatiently, tapping on the ground with her little blue shoe.

"Promise to congratulate me, first."

"Oh, I know now, and I'm so glad. I do congratulate you! I think you are very, very

lucky! But how I shall scold May for not telling me herself!"

"She did not feel inclined to come this evening."

"What a pity! I should so hate to miss a dance, even if—— Is this No. 5, Captain Ellis?"

"I've won my bet," she said gleefully as soon as Anstruther was out of hearing. "I was quite right; he is engaged, and you owe me that pair of gloves—white ones please, and 5½."

"He is engaged to Miss Trent, then?"

"Yes; just as I told you."

"I can't think how you got to know," and Captain Ellis seemed lost in admiration of her cleverness; "but Anstruther is an awfully good sort of fellow, and your friend is a very lucky girl."

"Do you really think so?" And Edie's little face was twisted into a quaint expression of distaste.

"Yes; indeed I do. Do you dislike him, or know anything against him?"

"Oh, no; but he rides so badly! Of course May is different, but I simply could not marry

a man who rode like that! And the way he dresses, too! I know it's silly of me to be so particular, but just think when he called on us he wore Oxford shoes—those patent leather things, you know,—and red socks! I simply sat and stared at them. I wasn't used to seeing shoes like that."

She broke into one of her usual little ripples of laughter, and Ellis, who was a first-rate rider, and always irreproachably dressed, felt an implied compliment, and laughed, too, with a pleasing sense of superiority.

"I shall get most awfully afraid of you, Miss Cracroft. Fancy your noticing little things like that! I thought young ladies never did."

"Oh, I always do—I can't help it; but I get so laughed at for it. Mamma quite scolded me the other day because she heard me say that if any one proposed to me in tennis dress, I should shriek! But if he was wearing those lovely long yellow riding boots, I should say, 'Yes,' in a minute."

"I'm so glad you told me. I'll order a pair first thing to-morrow morning."

"It's much too bad the way you chaff me," pouted Edie.

"Chaff you! Why, I was never more serious in my life."

Anstruther spent two dances standing in a doorway, then, after a little desultory talk with Mrs. Cracroft—a painfully thin lady with a fixed smile,—he decided that he was tired of it all, and felt more like walking and solitude than waltzing and society.

Carefully avoiding the appealing eyes of two or three partnerless girls he knew, he went outside and sent his syce and pony home. Then lighting a cheroot he strolled slowly along the deserted road towards his hotel. The quiet, and the stars, and the cool night calmed some of his excitement, and he began to think for the first time since the afternoon. Soberly considered, his position was not a very pleasant one. May had promised to marry him, and there was enough delight in that thought to dispel any other for a few minutes; but his doubts soon returned. Even while giving him her promise she had repeated her last year's decision that she did not love him, and embittered it, if any additional bitterness were needed, by saying that she looked on him as a means of escape from an unhappy home. But still he

knew there was no other man in the case. Although she did not love him, she loved no one else, and, with a man's usual calm assurance, he considered love only a question of time. She would love him when she knew him better, and he was not super-sensitive.

Now, after much consideration, he was very well satisfied with what the day had brought.

## CHAPTER III.

## GIRL'S GOSSIP.

"Only your pastime,  
A child will play so  
With a little wild bird,  
Unaware he kills it.  
Then turns it, feels it,  
Calls it with a mild word.  
Is angry after,  
Then again in laughter  
Loud is the child heard."

PIER MORONELLI.

MAY'S wish, when she came home, had been to go to her room without seeing her mother, but unluckily she met Mrs. Trent in the passage.

"Do you know that it is nearly eight o'clock? Far too late to be riding. And how are you going to find time to get cool—I see you are in a fever of heat—and dress for the dance before dinner?"

"I am not going to the dance."

"Not going! When did you make up your mind to that? Why, you have actually ordered



the ayah to get out your dress. I saw it all laid out in your room."

"Yes, I did ; but I decided this afternoon, while I was out, that I wouldn't go."

They had gone into the drawing-room together, and May dropped into a chair, while Mrs. Trent stood near. She was a large, handsome woman, curiously like her daughter in features, with a face that flushed when she was even slightly put out.

"You should try to be a little more thoughtful, May, I am not sorry not to go. These dances are always dull enough for me ; but there is that delicate white dress, which has been lying about, catching the dust and being fingered by the ayah, who you know is never clean."

"Oh, it really doesn't matter."

"That is not the right spirit in which to take what I say. I don't know how it is, but whenever I reprove you, even in the mildest way, you always make light of it. Go now and get ready for dinner."

May was excitable by nature, and she had been sorely tried that afternoon ; loosing her

self-control, she burst into tears, saying through her sobs, "I don't want any dinner or anything; leave me alone."

Mrs. Trent looked at her, then said very quietly, "Now, what is the meaning of this, May? Is it temper, or are you in trouble?"

Perhaps the apparent absence of sympathy had a good effect upon May, for she began to feel ashamed and tried to stop crying.

"It's nothing, nothing at all," she said, as soon as sobs would let her—"only—only while I was out I promised to marry Mr. Anstruther, and it seemed somehow—— Oh, I can't explain it, but I couldn't help crying."

Before her mother could speak, the girl gathered up her habit and went quickly out. Mrs. Trent wisely did not follow her; she was surprised and pleased at the turn affairs had taken, but May seemed excited, and it was best not to talk to her; she might make injudicious remarks. Half-an-hour later, when May came down, quiet and red-eyed, her mother was all that is sympathetic and tender; a little too glad, perhaps. But then Major Trent was in debt, the boys were at expensive schools, Eva was nearly seventeen and waiting her turn to come

out, and Anstruther was quite a catch as things go.

May went to her own room very early, and lay awake for hours, puzzling over the old problems, which only a few fortunate girls escape thinking of. Ought she to marry a man she did not care for, merely because it was convenient for her to do so, and because he wished it? No love on his part could make up for her lack of love, surely; and yet, was there ever any real love now?

You found it in novels, and only in novels. Among the girls she knew, who had married, there was a good deal of flattered vanity, and desire for home and position, but how much love? How very little! And yet they seemed happy enough—as happy as one could expect to be. They loved their husbands, in the end, she supposed; certainly they talked of them a great deal, if that meant anything. It was dreadful, though, marriage first, with the chance of love to follow. What if it did not follow? Ah! well, what matter even then, she would be one of a vast sisterhood of women who were unloving wives; better than being unloved, though probably that would be the ultimate

consequence of marrying without love. Would it be possible even for Anstruther to go on caring for her? Her constant companionship would doubtless cure him of any romantic feeling, and they had no tastes in common.

She tried to imagine spending a whole long day alone with him, and shuddered at the prospect. What would they do? What would they talk about?

Was it her face that had attracted him? She knew she was pretty, very pretty at times, but she was not beautiful, and she laughed a little bitterly at the idea of her bright color and dark eyes having any lasting influence.

When a girl is really in love, it seems to her that none have even felt as she feels: she finds a new path into Paradise, untrodden by other feet; but it appeared to May that she was entering a dungeon, worn by the steps of those who had passed before.

She was joining a throng, who, to a certain extent, of their own will, swell the numbers of the weary and disappointed, sorrowful, perhaps sinful, women of the earth.

Her youth's bright birthright of hope and love of novelty was to be taken from her, while

she received in exchange a wedding ring, duties from which she shrank, and a loving care that would weight her with the feeling of ingratitude.

Having bolted her door and looked carefully round the room, she read the marriage service, finding in it new cause for fear and hesitation, till at last she cried herself to sleep.

The next few days made her wonder? She adapted herself so easily in all outward seeming to the change that had come into her life; nothing mattered, her fate had brought her to this, and now the best must be made of it. She often revolted from what she had to do, but it was duty, and she did it, only hoping at times that Anstruther did not see what a burden it was to her.

"I am growing rapidly used to it all," she thought, "and I suppose hypocrisy will get easier and easier. From calling him 'Percy' with an effort, I shall change to 'Percy, dear,' or 'Percy, darling.' How incredible it seems now! And perhaps not mind when he kisses me, though it is difficult to imagine that."

Eddie Cracroft's prattle was one of her trials. The girls had not made friends in the plains,

but at Simla a superficial intimacy had sprung up, because they were near neighbors.

The Trents' house, Tregarven Cottage, stood a little below a much larger one belonging to the same landlord, and called Tregarven House, where lived the Cracrofts. This similarity of names caused great confusion between the letters sent to the two houses.

When Edie had nothing to do, she came to see May, and on the morning after the dance she hastened to her friend and sat down opposite her, fresh, dainty and pretty, evidently with the intention of learning everything.

"You naughty old pet," she began, carefully patting and arranging her fair fringe, although the girls were alone and May was not looking at her, "to think that you should get engaged without telling me."

"Seeing that my engagement dates from yesterday, I don't quite see how you could have heard of it sooner."

"Oh, you should have rushed to me at once. But never mind that ; I'll forgive you now. But when are you going to be married ? And you'll have me for a bridesmaid—won't you ? And

get Mr. Anstruther to give us those delicious bar brooches with a swallow on—do!”

“I shan’t be married for ages yet, I hope. I should like a long engagement, and as for bridesmaids, Edie, I have always meant to be married in a riding habit.”

“Oh, how horrible! O May! you can’t mean it, and I shouldn’t think it would be legal! Just think! you’d never get a chance of wearing white satin, and a long veil again; and fancy coming into the church and knowing every one was looking at you.”

“Yes, how very much one would think of the actual solemnity of being married. It’s the time of all others when a girl ought to forget her looks instead of thinking ‘Am I very flushed?’ ‘Oh, I wonder if my nose is red,’ and ‘Is my wreath fastened quite firmly?’ and ‘Will my left glove stick when I have to pull it off?’”

“Oh, I don’t think one need be as anxious as that,” said Edie. “You know one really needn’t put on the left glove, and if you dressed in lots of time, and powdered a little, you wouldn’t flush.”

“It would not be worth it, though, and then I’m sure men always hate big weddings: they

look so silly having to wait about before the bride comes."

"Some men are so careless. Did I ever tell you, May, about that great friend of mine, Gertie Carleton? Her father is a baronet, and, of course, she had a splendid wedding, and just as the service began, she was looking down—brides always ought to look down a little, I think—and she saw that the man—he was very rich you know, but fearfully *bourgeois*—had actually not got on a pair of new boots."

"You don't mean to say he was barefooted?" asked May, yawning.

"Heavens, no! But his boots weren't quite new and shiny, as they ought to have been. Gertie said she could have pinched him, she was so angry, poor girl! And she did speak to him about it the minute they were out of church."

"What a sweet, nice girl she must be!" said May.

"Oh, she's lovely, not a bit handsome you know, but so stylish, always perfectly turned out."

There was a pause, and then Edie went on: "But of course there is a good deal in Mr. An-



struther being a civilian. However grand a wedding you had, he couldn't be in uniform, and black coats are frightful ; and he is rather small for you, too—isn't he, May ? ”

“ I suppose so. He's not tall. But what does it matter ? ”

“ Don't you mind, not really ? Oh, I couldn't marry a short man. But then I'm so small. Anybody who cares for me is always very near six feet.”

Edie got up and fluttered round the room, then perched on the arm of a sofa near May.

“ Well, what's the secret now ? ” asked May, feeling sure there was some little mystery Edie was longing to tell her.

“ Oh, nothing ; at least, dear, you'll never forget and mention it to my mother—will you ? Promise.”

“ Not when I know what it is.”

“ I had a letter from Charlie Raymond this morning.”

“ Indeed ! Is he well ? ”

“ He's all right ; only dying to come up here, poor boy.”

“ Why ? Is it very hot where he is ? ”

Edie only laughed, and then May remem-

bered she had often heard her talk of Charlie Raymond.

"Edie, you've been flirting," she said, finding it difficult to assume the smile and air of interest her friend would expect.

Edie dimpled.

"He's such a nice boy, May, and I must say he is fonder of me than any one has ever been, and that's pleasant."

"Do you mean you are engaged to him?"

"Oh, no; how could I be? Why, he's only a Sub, and as poor as can be; he isn't even an eldest son. I daresay he thinks I am going to marry him some day," she concluded cheerfully.

"And you let him write to you?"

"How can I help it?"

"Very easily. Edie, I don't think this is right of you. I know you are very pretty, and lots of people admire you, but you ought not to flirt like this."

"I'm sure I'm very quiet up here."

"Quiet! Why every one expects that the next piece of news will be your engagement to Captain Ellis."

"You funny girl! How can I help people talking?"

"Naughty child," said May, laughing in spite of herself. "You look as soft and sweet and innocent as a kitten, but you have been stealing cream all the same. I can see it on your whiskers."

"Whiskers!" repeated Edie, stroking her pretty cheek. "But I can't stop to be scolded. I came over so early that I forgot to do the flowers, and I must rush. Good-bye, darling," and with a very short kiss and a very long look in a mirror, she took up her parasol and went.

"That's the sort of girl I ought to be," thought May; "just like a petting kitten and as heartless. She will have a happy life too, I feel sure of it; while I—— Oh, well, if I had been one of Edie's sort, I know Mr. Anstruther would never even have liked me." She had meant to be grateful for this, but the intention ended in a sigh, though she hardly dared to acknowledge that there would be any advantage in being like Edie.

"It's for life; that's the worst of it. I can't say that in such and such a time I shall be free to live my own life. I shall probably live to be

very old, and it will be 'Mr. Anstruther' every day. No, it won't,—it will be 'Percy,' which is far worse. Oh! well, 'dying grace is not living grace,' as the old woman used to say, and perhaps after we are really married I shall be better.

"He has made a deliberate choice at any rate. But still I am very sorry for him, and oh! I am very much sorrier for myself."

CHAPTER IV.

A RAINY AFTERNOON.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is,  
And the little less, and what worlds away."

R. BROWNING.

My life is sad and dark and dreary ;  
It rains, and the wind is never weary,

QUOTED May, stifling a yawn, and looking out of the window at the misty hills and the dripping pines.

"What did you say?" said Anstruther.

"Oh, nothing; only a bit of Longfellow that seemed to apply."

"Longfellow? Yes: he wrote the Psalm of Life; I remember learning it when I was a little boy at school."

"He wrote a few other things besides that perpetual Psalm, thank goodness," said May.

"Yes, I suppose so."

A pause. May found herself yawning again,

and to hide it, began to drum on the window pane, and sing under her breath,

“With hey-ho the wind and the rain.  
A foolish thing was but a toy,  
For the rain it raineth every day.”

“More Longfellow! You seem fond of him?”

“No; it happens to be Shakespeare this time.”

“I can’t read Shakespeare—never could; he is much too dull,” said Anstruther, in a tone of settled conviction.

“Well, if you call Shakespeare dull, I should like to know what you think lively.”

“I like a good novel, Ouida or Whyte-Melville, but I never pretend to care much for poetry.”

“As you evidently don’t read it, it’s just as well not to pretend to care for it.”

“You don’t really—do you, May? Girls always say they do.”

“I both say it and mean it. You will never teach me not to care for my own best poets.”

“You are rather hard to teach, I should think, dear. How long is it since I have been trying

to make you remember that I have a Christian name, and like to be called by it."

"I beg your pardon, Percy," and a yawn accompanied the name.

"That's the sixth time you've yawned in half-an-hour."

"Oh, well, think of that late ball last night."

"The ball was on Monday, and this happens to be Wednesday."

"So it is: I forgot; but I'm very tired, all the same."

"Tired of me, I suppose."

"Tired of the world, and everything therein contained," said May truthfully; hastily adding, "it's this horrid weather, Percy: I always feel cross and out of sorts in the rains."

"Bad temper is a great deal a matter of will; one can always prevent it."

"Then I've got no will at all."

"All the better, dear—then you are less likely to argue. But you know," he went on complacently, "I have a very bad temper by nature, but I never let it appear."

She thought that she had seen signs and strong signs of a bad temper more than once, but she wisely said nothing.

"If he only took the same view of things that I do," she thought, "a few more wet afternoons like this would serve to break off our engagement."

But he never minded long silences; he was always slow of speech, so slow, indeed, that May had often to check her desire to quickly finish his deliberate sentences for him. The wet afternoon that May found so irksome did not weary him. He looked at her, as she sat in a rocking chair, her head thrown back, and the soft lines of her cheek and neck clearly defined against the dark cushion, and saw the beauty of her face, but not its weary expression.

She, in her turn, looked at him, and since her engagement her eyes had been wonderfully opened to his defects. He was too slight, his nose was too long, his clothes did not fit him properly. Edie was right; he was too small for her. Like most girls she had imagined a tall, handsome lover, whom she could look up to in person and in mind; whereas Anstruther was her own height, perhaps a little less, and decidedly dull. He was rich in knowledge that she could not understand or appreciate, and lacking in everything that to her meant reading



and culture. She was perhaps narrow-minded, for all her sympathies were given to music and literature, while his one taste was for art. This might have drawn them together, only she had enough artistic training to know that his attempts at landscape painting were hopelessly bad, and not enough perception to see the honest love and feeling for art that actuated these daubs. He was always ready to talk about painting, but she was generally careful to avoid the subject—it made her want to laugh ; now, however, she was so much in need of talk that she began on it.

“Have you been doing any sketching lately ?” she asked, rocking very quickly.

“Not much, I have so little time ; but there’s rather a pretty view from the window of my room, and I get my bearer to wake me every morning before five. I am trying to get a sunrise effect on it.”

“What energy ! I don’t think anything in this world would make me get up at five o’clock.”

“It’s easy enough, one soon gets to like it, and it’s a good habit being able to wake at that time.”

"No, I can't agree about that. You see it is always easy to be waked at a certain hour, if one wants to, but it's impossible for early risers to keep asleep. Just think what a nuisance old Anglo-Indians are at home, getting up and tramping about the house before the servants are up or anything."

"The only real way to preserve the health in India is by morning walks and rides."

"In the plains, Percy, it's the real way to get fever. The night vapors are still hanging about."

"It's the rarest thing for me to have fever," said Anstruther; "I don't believe in medicine, or in taking too much care of oneself. Whenever I feel wrong, I always take some natural remedy, exercise or wine."

"Wine never struck me as being a natural remedy, somehow; temperance people say it is the worst product of an effete civilization."

"That's nonsense; they had it in the Bible."

"Hardly champagne, though!"

"Well, no, I suppose not," said Anstruther, pulling his moustache, and looking as though he were trying to remember some text which bore reference to Perrier Jouet très sec.

Percy, how gravely you take everything!"

"I don't see anything to laugh at here; wine is mentioned in the Bible."

"Yes, I know, and so are a good many other things. But, to come back to the present day, have you seen the latest photo of Edie?"

"You mean Miss Cracroft?"

"Of course I do! You must know her as Edie by this time; she always speaks of you as Percy, because I do."

It was a full-length photograph of Edie, in a white frock, standing, fan in hand, looking up. Spite of the head-rest, her lips wore their naturally-artificial smile, and, as May said, the most appropriate words to write under it would be Edie's favorite little remark:

"Then you do forgive me—don't you? And you are not angry with me—are you?"

Anstruther looked at it, and began to laugh. "She certainly ought to have waited and given this one to Ellis, instead of letting him get the one that didn't flatter her painted."

"Edie says she never gives away photographs."

"Well, she must have broken her rule. It was over at the hotel, yesterday, after lunch, we

were all smoking in the verandah, half-a-dozen men or so, and one of those Delhi miniature painters came up with his stock-in-trade. They really do miniatures rather well ; I must have one done of you, darling."

"Yes. But about Edie ; for she assured me yesterday there was nothing between her and Captain Ellis."

"I was going to tell you. This man spread out all his things, and we praised them, till he got quite set up ; and just at the end he pulled a case out of his pocket, and handed it round. The first man who saw it called out, 'That's Miss Cracroft,' and it was a miniature of Edie, sure enough, and done from a rather old photo, I should say. The man must have forgotten his directions, for he had made her hair as yellow as Cawnpore leather, and her eyes bright blue instead of brown."

"But did Captain Ellis say it was his ?"

"Oh, no ! he wasn't there, he lives at the Club ; but the man himself said, when he heard us speak of Miss Cracroft : 'No, that is no for Cracroft Sahib : it is on account of Captain Ellis Sahib, and I am now taking it to him.' We all shouted, and then we told him to tell Ellis

Sahib that Cheyne Sahib, and Anstruther Sahib, and all the Sahibs at that hotel had seen it, and thought it a very good likeness! The old man went off delighted, salaaming. I wonder if he gave the message!"

"Poor Edie, I don't think that's fair; it will get her talked about."

"She won't mind; I dare say she will rather enjoy it."

May was silent, thinking how easily fate deals with some people. Edie's life seemed to go on merrily, with no trouble more serious than a little flirtation, certainly nothing so terrible as marriage. She was perhaps exacting, but she found the better she knew Anstruther, the more heavily did the prospect of spending her life with him weigh on her, though she loyally tried to put the thought out of her mind. It all came round to her doctrine of *kismet*: to marry him was her fate; not a bright or attractive one, but still better than some, and pleasing to her father and mother.

May, herself, was the only person not satisfied with her engagement: Major and Mrs. Trent were delighted; Anstruther as sedately happy as his nature allowed; Eva, in her

boarding-school, was overjoyed at the idea of coming to India in the winter, and being able to stay with a married sister.

All Mrs. Trent's friends congratulated her on having secured a rising young civilian for her daughter. It has been said that wedding bells always ring the love-knell of some second man or woman, whose dearest hopes have been disappointed, but in this case one or two subalterns who had fancied they loved May were long since consoled; while as for Anstruther, a girl to whom he had once proposed declared, on hearing of his approaching marriage, that she "would give him away with a light heart."

There being no reason for delay, except May's wishes, it was settled that the wedding should be at the beginning of October, after an engagement of two months. On one point she was firm—the ceremony should be perfectly quiet, and they would go away directly after.

A long train of thought having at last come to a standstill, May realized that she had been silent for many minutes, and that Anstruther was sitting near, waiting to be talked to.

"Thank heaven! when we are married I shall never need to make talk, and what a comfort it is

he is not sentimental : it would add a new terror to life if we had to sit hand-in-hand," she thought, as she plunged into an argument on the merits of the last concert, a subject concerning which Anstruther knew little and cared less.

May had been surprised and relieved to find that he was one of the least demonstrative of men. His nature was not a tender one, or rather he was extremely reserved by habit as well as nature, and save on the rarest occasions was accustomed to hide his feelings. His love for May was stronger than the girl knew, which was perhaps the reason why his manner to her was quiet and friendly.

Probably it would have been easier to win May's love by a display of passion then ; but a man seldom knows what to do, until the opportunity for doing it is past.

The discussion of the concert came to an end, the clock struck six, and May realized, with a sigh, that he would probably stay another hour. She turned eagerly to the piano. "I have learnt a new song, Percy ; would you like to hear it ?"

"Just as you like, dear ; but I don't mind—

don't trouble." And May felt unable to sing after that.

Another pause. May flung herself back in the rocking chair ; he looked peaceful and contented ; while outside the rain fell heavily and steadily from the grey sky upon the green hills.



## CHAPTER V.

### A BOUQUET AND A BROOCH.

- Where the harder nature soften,  
And the softer harden,  
Certes ! such things have been often  
Since we left Eve's garden."

L. GORDON.

IT is the fashion for Anglo-Indians to call themselves "exiles," though probably most of them would grumble at any change of fortune which necessitated spending the rest of their lives in England. We do make merry out here, as much as is possible to us, for our only amusements are those we get up among ourselves. If we want music, we must listen to the singing of Mrs. Retcar, the civilian's wife, or the very amateur-violin-playing of Major Graes of the Artillery. If we want a play, and are not energetic enough to organize or act for ourselves, we go to see our friends, wigged and painted, pretending to be actors. When Lilian Vavasour weeps despairingly on Brown's shoulder, we are

entirely taken up by the idea that she, Lilian (Mrs. Maset, the colonel's wife, with a grown-up daughter coming out next cold weather) looks wonderfully young, considering ; only it's a pity that Brown (young Bessee, of the Ineligibles) isn't a little squarer, or she a little slighter.

But, in spite of our working at our play, and trying to lead at Simla a kind of limping London life, any sight and sound that reminds us of dear England is precious and prized. I have seen a pretty woman, young and happily married, with a husband who worshipped her, and a larger circle of friends and admirers than a life at home would have given her, burst into tears at the sound, unfamiliar in India, of a cracked barrel organ. She had everything to make life pleasant, but this old jingling tune recalled the dingy London square where her early girlhood had been spent, and she cried. It was the reverse of Wordsworth's Susan : a river did not flow through the vale of Cheapside, but Kensington ranged its narrow streets on the Himalayas. One of the chief charms of the beautiful little glen, that favorite spot for Simla picnics, is its likeness to an English valley. A steep path, thickly bordered with trees

and ferns, leads down to where a small brown stream ripples over grey stones, like those in a Yorkshire brook.

Towards the middle of September, when the rains are nearly over and skies are clear and bright again, Mrs. Inmer gave a tea picnic at the Glen.

Mrs. Inmer was one of those fortunate women who, without having a single good feature, was always considered handsome; she thought herself beautiful, and dressed as though she were, which has a great deal to do with it. Her husband had been killed by an accident about a year before, but this had had no serious effect on her naturally good spirits which had always made her a most popular woman. Any picnic given by her was sure to be a Noah's Ark one—with the couples carefully chosen.

On this occasion Edie Cracroft, in a costume that suggested a Dresden china shepherdess, with a small hat perched high on her pretty hair, had Captain Ellis walking by her 'rickshaw.

Mr. Inmer, who never looked better than in her habit, was riding slowly down with her latest favorite, a big foolish-faced young man, belonging to a British regiment. She liked

boys. May had been invited, somewhat to her surprise, but both her mother and Anstruther had wished her not to go, so she went for a long and dull ride with Anstruther instead.

A real, scrambling, boil-your-own-kettle picnic is not often given in India, and Mrs. Inner's guests would have been surprised if they had not found tea ready, and *khitmutghars* waiting at the end of the steep descent.

Soon afterwards Edie and Ellis strolled away together. Mrs. Cracroft, with her anxious eyes, was not there, and Mrs. Inner was known as the nicest of negligent chaperons.

When they were out of sight of the others, Edie slipped her hand through Ellis' arm, and nestled up to him, with a little petting gesture, that would have told a good deal to a looker-on.

"Dighton, dear," she said, in her smallest voice, "I am going to give you such a scolding. Do you know that on the way down here you called me 'Edie' quite loud up, and that horrid Mrs. Ongaras was close behind! I'm sure she heard with those long ears of hers."

"I shouldn't mind," said Ellis, "if the whole

lot of them heard me call you 'Edie' or 'Darling' either."

"Oh, but I should ; you must be careful."

"Look here, Edie. You know, of course, I wouldn't say a word until you let me ; but I don't think, dear, that you are doing quite the square thing by your mother. Why not tell her that we are engaged ?"

"Hush ! don't speak so loud."

"Tell her that I want to marry you—and that you would try to put up with me," said Ellis, obediently speaking in a whisper, and bending his head very near Edie's pink cheek, "or let me tell her, or I'll write to your father if you would rather."

"You don't want me to stand till I am too tired to dance to-night, do you ?" said Edie, evading his question, and they sat down on a large stone.

Ellis was handsome, in spite of a figure that threatened to become heavy in a few years, and Edie was unusually pretty as, with her little *minauderies* forgotten for once, she looked up at her lover with a tender, innocent look on her soft face.

Secrets were Edie's dearest delight. She

would always have preferred a secret engagement to an open one, but in this case she knew that telling her mother would result in breaking off with Ellis. Mrs. Cracroft over-rated her pretty daughter, and meant her to marry well. She had no money—all the better reason that her sweet face and taking manners should win her a rich husband.

Dighton Ellis had only his captain's pay, his debts, and his real love for Edie, which the girl knew and prized. She had a shallow little nature, but she loved the tall young soldier with all the strength of it, and dreaded the dispersion of their romance.

Sitting by him on the grey rock, her hands feeling very small and weak in his strong ones, she could imagine herself the heroine of a novel.

"Dighton, dear, you don't know my mother as I do. I suppose she is fond of me really, but if you told her about—about this, she would make me so unhappy."

"You don't mean she'd be unkind to you, darling?"

"Oh, she would seem kind, of course; but the things she'd say to me would be dreadful,

and I should never be allowed to dance or ride with you, I feel sure; and she is so dreadfully—she thinks so much of money, you know,” sighed Edie, who was the last girl in the world to tolerate even comparative poverty.

“If I only wasn’t so confoundedly poor!”

“As if I minded that! But, oh Dighton, I mustn’t disobey my father and mother, must I?”

The nobility of this remark made Ellis overlook the fact, that to be hopelessly and secretly engaged is not the modern ideal of filial piety and obedience.

“All sorts of things may happen, though,” said Edie more cheerfully, after a pause. “Some one might die and leave you a lot of money. At any rate, dear, isn’t it a comfort to know that we can trust each other: that we shall be true and faithful, whatever happens, shan’t we?”

“My darling!”—and then there was no more talk of cruel parents, only sunset and the return home came far too soon.

“Mrs. Inmer is going to take me to the ball to-night, so I know I shall enjoy it,” purred Edie to Ellis, on the road up.

“Splendid! Then you’ll give me as many

dances as I want for once ; she won't say anything."

"How many would that be?"

"The whole programme, from the first quadrille down to 'God save,' of course."

"If I only could, but how many really?"

"Let's see—Nos. 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 15 and the extras."

"Mrs. Inner always stays to the end—do, Edie. I went all the way down to Annandale to-day to order you such a big bouquet."

"Did you? How sweet of you ; I will then." And here Mrs. Ongaras joined them.

That evening when May Trent was dressing for the dance, her ayah brought in a large bouquet made entirely of heliotrope, deliciously fresh and fragrant.

"How very nice of Percy," she thought, for it was the first time he had ever sent her flowers, and she asked her ayah if this was from Anstruther Sahib. The ayah, who, according to the custom of her class, knew nothing, went to ask, and returned, saying that the man did not know the Sahib's name, but it was to "Tregarven Gher" that he had been told to bring it.



"It may be for Edie, then. She told me she had a perfectly new heliotrope dress for to-night. How can I get to know? I have a good mind to tease her by taking it to the dance myself, and asking her there if it is hers."

As she raised the flowers to her face, delighting in their cool freshness, she saw something that looked like a scrap of paper among the stalks; pulling it out it proved to be a little folded note, not addressed, only these words:

"Remember 4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 15, and the extras—darling."

That decided it; it must be for Edie, and she hastily replaced the note and sent the bouquet to Tregarven House. She saw it in Edie's hand that night, and had no difficulty in guessing who had sent it to her.

Edie was looking radiantly pretty, with very bright cheeks and eyes, and Ellis, who was always quick to see anything connected with her, noticed a new ornament shining in the tulle on the front of her dress; a gold bar tipped with pearl, and a diamond swallow flying across it.

"That's an awfully pretty sort of brooch. Where did you get it, Edie?"

"Oh, this dicky bird! Isn't it a pet? An old friend sent it me; it only came this evening."

The English mail had come in that night, so Ellis naturally thought of an old friend at home, and was satisfied; but a few weeks later down in Maidanpore, when any one having claims against the estate of the late Lieutenant Charles Merton Raymond was requested to communicate with the undersigned, Dighton Ellis, Captain, President, Committee of Adjustment, Hamilton sent in a bill for one diamond brooch, and Ellis understood.

"Who is that?" asked Edie, during the eighth dance; "that" being a tall and exceedingly ugly old man, in a brilliant uniform.

"Don't you know General Scarew? Benjamim Scarew is his full name. He comes from somewhere on the Bombay side, he's very rich, he's been twice married, and he's supposed to be looking out for a third wife. There's a chance for you, Edie!"

"A woman may not marry her grandfather. Why don't you read your Prayer-book more, my dear Dighton."

"She mayn't and shouldn't, but she often does."

"Well, a nice grandfather, perhaps, but not one like that. Look at his eyes; he can't be good with that expression—can he?"

"When people want to describe General Ben, they don't often call him good. Seriously, dear, he is not a particularly nice old fellow, though he is so high up in the service. They say his first wife ran away from him, though that is so long ago no one really remembers, and certainly his sons and daughters, who are all grown up now, emigrate or marry as soon as they can."

"Why doesn't he retire? He must be very near the end of his service."

"No, he's got a year or two more, though there's no need for him to hold on for pension; he's got no end of a place at home. Some of my people live near, and they say it's quite like an old house in a story, picturesque and stands in a big park, you know."

"Nice for him," said Edie yawning. "There go May and her fiancé. I thought she hadn't been invited to this dance. Dighton, I am so grateful that you are tall. Fancy having a hus-

band about one's own height—it would be fearful! Look, the floor is a little clearer; let's go on dancing."

## CHAPTER VI.

### A PACKET OF ENVELOPES.

“ My heart is a breakin’, dear Tittie,  
Some counsel unto me come len’;  
To anger them a’ is a pity :  
But what will I do wi’ Tam Glen ? ”

BURNS.

It was the 30th of September, and Major Trent, who was too hard-working to spare a longer time, came up, on ten days’ leave, to give his daughter away. The wedding was fixed for the 5th of October, and May had carried her point, and was to be married in a riding habit.

Anstruther did not quite like this—partly from an innate contrariness in his nature, which May was beginning to discover, and partly because he thought it would not sound well in home letters. His mother would not like it ; it would disappoint his sisters. But May was obstinate. If they had been at home she would have had his sisters and hers as bridesmaids, and satin, and speeches and crying and cake ; but out here, in

India, she did not care to serve as a spectacle for mere acquaintances.

"As I can't have Eva for my bridesmaid, I won't have anyone," she declared, and Edie Cracroft was very much offended.

On the morning of the 30th, however, May felt so anxious to escape from her own thoughts and her mother's talk, that, spite of their quarrel, she went to see Edie uninvited. Mrs. Cracroft was out, and Edie was delighted to see her.

She only cared for her friends when she needed some thing from them in the way of help or sympathy, and May guessed, from the warmth of her greeting, that she was in trouble, or had been doing something wrong, perhaps both.

"You kind darling! I was afraid to come to you. I thought you would be too busy and too absorbed to be able to think of me, but I wanted to see you so."

"What is the matter, then?"

"I'm simply persecuted. I'm going grey with worry!" said Edie, stroking her pale yellow hair.

"Why, there can be nothing serious," laughed May; "won't your mother let you have a quite

new frock for the next ball? Never mind; wear that heliotrope one—it suits you perfectly.”

“Do you really think so? Lots of people have told me it did. But, May dear, I’m very, very unhappy.”

She sat down near her as she spoke, and looked up with an appealing expression, and there were real tears in the soft brown eyes.

“What can it be, Edie; tell me, dear?”

“Well,” said Edie, pushing a pretty foot out from mere force of habit, “you know mother always wanted me to make a good match—a man in a real position, with a place at home—a man who is somebody, you know. She says she would rather see me dead in my coffin than married to a subaltern, and, of course, a captain is only just one little step better than a sub.”

“Nonsense,” said Mary, fervently; “if you love anyone really, money doesn’t matter a bit.”

She felt as though, standing on the threshold of her own loveless marriage, it was her duty to warn back this happier and freer girl from following her example.

“Oh, but it does; it would be hateful to be poor! Fancy living in a poky little bungalow in India, and not able to go to the hills even if

you were dying, and never going home, and having to have all one's dresses made in the verandah, and being pitied by lots of people."

"Of course there would be some hardships, but it would certainly be better in the end."

"No, it wouldn't. He wouldn't like to see me looking ill and ugly, and he would have to economize, too, and he'd have to give up his polo ponies, and bets at races and billiards, and smoke cheap cheroots. I'm sure it's true kindness to give him up."

"It's all very well to jilt a man on principles of the highest morality, Edie, but you ought never to have encouraged him at all."

"Don't be cross. I want you to be so kind to me, I have been crying all the morning," and Edie laid her head against May's arm with a pretty petting gesture which Ellis knew well.

"Tell me the trouble, then, dear?"

"It's this: you know Dighton Ellis is very fond of me. I believe he thinks I am going to marry him some day. Poor fellow! Isn't he good-looking? I always like tall men. Charlie Raymond is very tall, too, but Dighton dances best—don't you think so?"



"I don't know. But do you mean you are secretly engaged to Captain Ellis?"

"How could I marry him?" asked Edie pathetically; "he's only got about £100 a year besides his pay, and he isn't an eldest son. I'm very fond of him, I used to know one of his sisters at school, and of course that drew us together; but oh, May, you won't forget and mention a word of this to mother, will you? Promise, really promise!"

May was silent for a minute, but she was very sure that nothing she could say to Mrs. Cracroft would benefit Edie or Captain Ellis in any way, so she promised.

"You know, dear," went on Edie, "I am not all heart as some girls seem proud to be. I have a great deal of ambition—that is one of the reasons I should hate to marry a subaltern. Now I have a chance of making a match that would quite satisfy my ambition, but would leave my heart out of the matter."

"It all depends on the man, and not on his money."

"More's the pity! Well, this man," said Edie, wrinkling up her nose, "he's certainly not handsome, though he is tall, I am glad to say,

and he is older than I am, a good deal older, though I don't really think that matters."

"You seem to have made up your mind to accept him! Tell me his name."

"Oh, never mind about the name now. But advise me what I am to do. It is so hard to give up Dighton, and it would be dreadful to disobey mother, and Charlie Raymond isn't here."

"Edie, you are in a perfect tangle of folly, and it's very wrong of you to deceive men in this way."

"Did I ever ask them to fall in love with me?"

"No, but you did much worse than that, and I'm sure you don't care at all really. Marry this rich old man, you had better: it will save you from breaking some young man's heart."

"He's a general, you know, and a general commanding. Oh, I might do so much worse. Think of being the *burra mem* of a whole station."

"Edie, dear—not General Scarew! You can't mean he is the man!" cried May.

"Yes, I thought you'd guess. I suppose you've seen him with me a great deal. Did you notice

a huge lily bouquet I had at the last dance ? He sent it."

"That dreadful old man ! Why, he has been twice married, and he's nearly old enough to be your grandfather, and people tell horrible stories about him. Edie, you mustn't—it would be too fearful !"

This was the worst line of argument May could have taken. Edie at once defended her conquest, and was angry at hearing him disparaged.

"People talk a great deal of foolish scandal out here ; and if you knew General Scarew as I do, you would appreciate the honor he does me in asking me to be his wife."

"It's dishonor ! He only likes you because you are so young and pretty. Dear, you mustn't think of marrying him !"

"Nothing is settled yet, of course ; and I must ask you not to repeat what I have said to any one," said Edie very stiffly.

May tried to make it up with her, but Edie was impossibly formal and dignified, besides being offended with her friend. She had her reasons for wanting to get rid of her, and May soon went.

A few minutes later Captain Ellis' card was brought in. She glanced at the clock, only half-past twelve, and her mother was certain not to be in before two. She sent out the card-box, which silently stated, "Mrs. Cracroft not at home;" and thus guarded against interruption, she had a long talk with Ellis. His leave was up, and he was going back to Maidanpore, the station in the plains, where Charlie Raymond was, with a firm belief in Edie's love and faith.

"I want to say, Dighton darling," said Edie, as they stood together, when he at last had to go, "that if you hear any nasty rumors about me, you are not to believe them, for people do talk so. Remember, that if anything should happen, I will write to you at once." While she spoke she was twisting a button on his coat with so much force that the fastening broke and it came off her in fingers.

"There! look what I've done!" she said, laughing, and glad to change the subject; "and you needn't expect that I shall offer to sew it on again, Dighton; I shall keep it as a memento. I'm a tiresome little wretch, spoiling your coat for you—aren't I, dear?"

"That button shall never be replaced, and I shall keep this coat and wear it as long as one rag holds to another," declared Ellis solemnly.

"Nice thing! But you are forgetting; I have got some envelopes to give you," and Edie brought him a packet of them all addressed to herself in various hand-writings.

"But how did you get all these?" said Ellis, looking them over.

"Oh, it was such fun! I felt like a professional forger. I can copy writing rather well, so I copied off the envelopes of a lot of girls I know out here. Mother always looks at the outside of my letters; but if she thinks they are from girls, she never asks anything about them."

"It doesn't seem straightforward, dear," said Ellis, putting the envelopes into his pocket.

"Of course, if you prefer never to write to me at all, the remedy is in your own hands," pouted Edie.

After he had gone, Edie took out of its hiding-place in her room a carefully locked little despatch-box, and put into it a letter she had received that morning. It was a long one, dated from Maidanpore, signed "Charlie," and not of a kind she would have shown her mother.

The envelope was exactly like one of those she had given Ellis. Then she looked for a safe place for the coat button, and laid it in the morocco case which held the diamond brooch ; that too lived in the despatch-box.

“Dear Dighton,” she murmured, “and poor Charlie! Well, it’s not my fault ; I can’t marry three people at once, and I don’t a bit know how it is to end. That brooch is quite lovely, dear Charlie. Just think, I shan’t see Dighton again till we go down to Maidanpore. He really is very fond of me. Poor Dighton.”

## CHAPTER VII.

### TWO LETTERS.

"What's to be done, what's to be done?  
For of three that woo I can take but one,  
And there's no sense in it under the sun."

JEAN INGELow.

"O PERCY, isn't it a comfort to think that it's all safely over, and we shall never need to get married again."

It was five o'clock on the 5th of October, and May and Anstruther were on their way to Mashobra, that usual honeymoon resort for people who are married in Simla.

May, in the brown habit, which had served her as a wedding dress, had mounted at the church door, having said her good-byes to her father and mother before she left home. Anstruther appreciated the quiet and comfort of this arrangement, and remembered gratefully, how often, at a big wedding, he had pitied the

bridegroom waiting and fidgeting nervously for twenty minutes in the chancel. But still he maintained that his mother and sisters would not approve of it. May had resolved to be "very good and not to cry," and kept her resolve bravely, but many hours of wakefulness and tears the night before caused her to look somewhat haggard. Now, however, the relief of the actual ceremony being over raised her spirits immensely.

"This road is rather narrow, Percy," she said brightly; "but, all the same, I'll race you to the toll-bar, if you like."

She was longing for a quick canter, but her husband's dull voice checked her.

"I don't feel at all like racing, dear. What we have done is a solemn thing, and I can't understand you."

She interrupted him, fearing he was going to say something that she should think unkind.

"Do you think it does not seem solemn to me too, Percy?" and she blinked to keep back tears which were perilously near her eyes. "Dear, don't let us misunderstand each other, even a little, at the very beginning. Remember that I don't always say exactly what I mean



—I mean that you mustn't always take my remarks *au pied de la lettre*."

"My darling, I don't think I am likely to misunderstand you—if love will help me not to," he said with unaccustomed warmth. She held out her right hand to him, and for a little way along the deserted road the horses went quietly side by side, while their riders' hands were clasped.

The sun sets early in October, and the last radiance was flooding the hills. May was reminded of that evening, scarcely three months ago, when her future had been finally decided, and a feeling of terror, almost of revolt, sprang up in her mind as she looked at Anstruther—her husband now. Sunset is always a depressing time ; and among mountains one is apt to be peculiarly overcome, and borne down, as it were, with the weight of the universe.

She tried a few commonplace sentences, to which he replied briefly. He was thinking of her, and looking at her, but he did not care to talk to her. At last, to break the silence, she began to sing half aloud, rather a habit of hers, and her songs were generally appropriate and fitted her thoughts. This time she sang—

"The night has a thousand eyes,  
And the day but one;  
Yet the light of the whole world dies  
With the dying sun."

Then she found herself humming the next verse very quickly, that Anstruther might not hear the words:

"The mind has a thousand eyes,  
And the heart but one;  
Yet the light of a whole life dies  
When love is done."

"How absurd I am," she thought; "love is not done—it ought to be just beginning for me: I suppose it is. I wonder if long silence is a habit of Percy's. I don't think it means that he is bored: I hope not."

In the course of the next few days she learnt that long silence certainly was a habit of his, and it meant nothing. He was always willing to listen to her when she chose to talk, and smiled and pulled his moustache when she ventured on quotations that he did not understand or recognize; but, for his own part, he did not talk—at least not what she called talking.

She knew he was very much in love with her,

and she wondered why, for they had no real sympathies ; but she waited for it all to come right. " Our angles will fit in time," she thought ; " our little originalities will wear off, like pebbles rolled together, and we shall trundle peacefully along in a groove." But the prospect did not delight her. In one respect they were fortunate : the weather was beautiful, crisp, clear and sparkling, and the Mashobra woods were at their loveliest, at least for those who prefer the changing colors of autumn to the fresh green promise of spring. May used to wonder what the unhappy people did who were foolishly married in the rains, and spent a dripping honeymoon seven miles from anywhere. No one can even pretend to enjoy a damp paradise ; and though the usual wedding month is always in India mercifully curtailed to a week or so, only the Mashobra houses can say how much quarrelling has been caused by one wet day succeeding another with maddening regularity. Imagine a bride, whose pretty fringe refuses to stay in curl, and a bridegroom, whose cheroots are hopelessly damp, shut up together, with no chance of seeing anyone, or hearing anything but the rain drumming on the tin

roof, and you have the materials for a very complete little tragi-comedy, especially if, as often happens, they have married less than six weeks after their first meeting.

Anstruther and May were spared this; he fortunately had some arrears of work to do, and she found time to rid her conscience of all the duty letters that had been accumulating for the last five months.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Cracroft was a proud and happy woman. May's "successful marriage" had made her anxious that Edie should do better. Edie was a year older than May, and, as her mother thought, infinitely prettier. A rising young civilian was well enough, but Edie required the best; and according to Mrs. Cracroft, the best was to be found in General Scarew. Certainly, he was fifty-five, and broken down in many ways by the hard life he had led; but, to weigh against this, he was a General Commanding, he had money apart from his pay, and above all a place at home. It was the dream of Mrs. Cracroft's life to see Edie with a place at home!

To do her justice, Mrs. Cracroft was an excellent mother, according to her lights, and would

never have forced Edie into a marriage that was really distasteful to her ; but the girl's shallow nature was irresistibly attracted by the idea of money and position, and she was not sensitive enough to realize the degradation of marrying so old a man for such reasons. Had it not been for Ellis, Edie would at once have accepted General Scarew's proposal that she should be his third wife ; but, as it was, she asked for time to consider.

She was very unhappy for a whole day ; spite of the thought of diamonds and the "place at home," and being the *burra mem* of a whole station for the few years more that the general remained in India, the memory of Ellis' face and voice pervaded her whole mind.

He was so handsome, so tall and young, and honestly fond of her ; his last letter, which had come only that morning, was full of love and faith ; it was distinctly too bad that he should be so poor.

But then the dear fellow had really no prospects, and he was in debt, and he had a fondness for ponies and racing, and she needed everything round her dainty and pleasant, and

she shook her head. It would be cruel to marry him.

Just think, mused Edie, of the dâk-bungalow way in which we should have to live, a big table and two or three plain chairs, and window curtains of yellow stamped muslin, that cost two rupees in the bazaar. He's so much in debt, poor fellow. I know it would be as bad as that, and he'd have to sell all his polo ponies, and we should go about in a bamboo cart, drawn by the worst of the ponies, the one that got lamed in the spring tournament, I dare say, for it wouldn't fetch a hundred rupees. Fancy paying calls in a tall dusty cart, driving oneself, while the syce held an umbrella over one's head. Poor Dighton! But I really couldn't! Worst of all, perhaps, he'd give up his regiment and go into the Staff Corps. How fearful! I couldn't care for a man in the Black Cavalry: or more awful still he might get into a Goorkha Regiment, and wear an all-dark uniform and black gloves at dances. Oh, he'd look like a demon! No, I forgot! How stupid of me: he couldn't go into the Staff Corps now, he's too old; but anyway it's impossible. Dighton disposed of, she went on to Charlie Raymond, and opening the little

despatch box, she took out a photograph of a pleasant, plain boy with a forage cap on one ear.

He's absurdly young, of course, only two-and-twenty, but he's very fond of me, certainly; it was nice of him to send me that brooch. What a pity that his invalid brother is the eldest, he'd have quite a good income else. But, oh well, I don't know; it would seem *infra dig.* somehow to marry a subaltern. Lieutenant and Mrs. So-and-So always looks absurd, I think. There's a very great deal in position, and I am ambitious—it's no good saying I'm not—and I'd better write to Dighton and get it over.

So thinking, she locked up the little despatch box and began a letter, which, after a good deal of thought, finally grew to this:—

TREGARVEN HOUSE,

October 8th.

DEAR CAPTAIN ELLIS,

Do you remember that I said if anything should happen, I would write to you at once? I must keep my promise of doing that now, for something has happened. Dighton, since you left, the truth has been slowly borne in upon me that we are not suited for each other. We should never be happy together, and it would be hateful to be poor, wouldn't it?

The only thing for me to do is to release you from

our engagement, for I feel it would be positively wrong for me to hold you to it ; it is all for your sake, and impossible every way. As for me, I have made up my mind to obey my mother, and hope that some day I shall find happiness in doing my duty.

We shall come back to Maidanpore some time next month. Don't write to me again, but you'll tell me when we meet that you are not angry with me, won't you? And you must promise to come to my wedding.

Yours sincerely,

EDITH CRACROFT.

She was satisfied with this, and thought it would impress Ellis favorably ; then she prepared to write to Charlie Raymond with a sense of relief—he's such a boy, it won't be much trouble. Accordingly, she wrote quickly in a free bold hand :—

TREGARVEN HOUSE,

October 8th.

DEAR CHARLIE,

Though I really mean never to call you that again, a most surprising thing is going to happen ! I am actually going to be married, though at present it's a dead secret ; but you won't tell anybody, I know. Of course, now, I must ask you not to write to me again, but we'll stay good friends, won't we ? I wonder if you know General Scarew ? He commands a division somewhere on the Bombay side,



and they say he's got a lot of influence at Headquarters, so we might try if he couldn't do something for you, as you always say you hate Maidanpore so. Would you like to be an A.D.C.? I think it would suit you splendidly.

We shall meet at Maidanpore next month, and you must keep your congratulations till then. By the bye, you mustn't think of getting me a wedding present, you extravagant boy! When the time comes, I'll show mother that pretty brooch you sent me the other day, and say that was your present, as it is!

In haste,

E. C.

That afternoon General Scarew was engaged again for the—I should be afraid to say—how manyeth time in his long life, and that evening, after Edie had gone to her room, she reddened her brown eyes and disfigured her pretty face by the longest and bitterest fit of crying, over the little despatch box, that she had ever had.

With the recklessness born of midnight thoughts, she longed to cancel all her day's work; but her letters had nearly reached Umballa, and General Scarew was to give her her engagement ring to-morrow.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ANOTHER RIDE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

“ Life is thorny, and youth is vain ;  
And to be wroth with one we love  
Doth work like madness in the brain.”

S. COLERIDGE.

THE morning sun was blazing down on Maidanpore Cantonments. There had been a slight shower in the night, enough to make the air disagreeably moist without cooling it. Although it was the 10th of October, there was still venom in the sun's rays, and morning parade was not a thing to rejoice over and delight in.

Colonel Hallon, the Commanding Officer of the Ineligibles—a regiment which owned Ellis as one of its recent captains, and Raymond as a junior subaltern—was always fussy, but, on this particular morning, he had been maddening, and it was with the sense of perils past that the officers went back to their quarters.

Since Ellis' return from Simla he had invited Raymond to share his bungalow—partly

because he liked the boy, and partly from a desire for economy, which was a new trait in his character.

They were both sitting under the punkah, stretched out in long dog-cart chairs in a dishevelled, open-at-the-throat, and loose-everywhere-else condition, that was a fine contrast to their trim neatness of half an hour before.

The room was a small one and very untidy with polo sticks, hog spears, and a gun-case or two in an irregular stack in one corner; cheroot boxes on the bare mantelpiece, and several yellow-backed novels, both French and English, lying among Urdu grammars and dictionaries—for Raymond was trying to pass the Lower Standard.

Raymond was a rather lanky young fellow, with a short nose and good-natured eyes; he was almost ugly, but the face was a taking one, and he was generally popular. He was lying back as nearly flat as his chair would permit, and on his chest sat firmly and heavily his devoted-terrier Squib, apparently wondering for the hundredth time if a cheroot were good to eat, and, if not, why his master was so fond of it.

"O Squib, my son," he groaned as the dog turned briskly round in pursuit of a flea, "you must go into training; it strikes me there's much, too much, of you for a hurdle race."

"Send the beast off," said Ellis; "it makes me hot to look at him sitting on you like that."

"Not a bit of it! We don't mind: do we, Squib, old boy? The dâk's awfully late this morning."

"You're in a hurry then, seemingly, for it's only just due."

"Your watch is slow, for here it comes."

Their letters were given to them in separate packets, so Ellis did not see the familiar writing on one of Raymond's envelopes. The boy sat up with a suddenness that sent Squib tumbling over, and tore open that envelope first. He read the short note through twice and his face grew pale, but Ellis was too startled by his own letter from Edie to notice him. Raymond said, "O Hell!" in a husky voice, and went to his room, closely followed by Squib.

The clock struck half-past nine, and then ten, but Ellis did not think of going over to the mess for breakfast, the *Pioneer* remained un-

opened, and his half-smoked cheroot tumbled over and went out on the durree.

He was trying to realize that the girl he had loved had never existed. He read and re-read her good-bye to him, and felt puzzled. The creature who had written this silly heartless scribble could never have been what he thought her. He had been a fool, and she had been worse, and it was all over.

Better than marrying her, perhaps, after all. But, good heavens, what was a man to believe in, if things like this could happen so suddenly?

He passed his hand hard over his forehead two or three times and called for a peg. His head felt as dazed and queer as though he had been drinking the night before, yet he knew he hadn't. Edie's letter he tore into little pieces. What he had to do now was to forget the girl, and not to show her that he had suffered from her treatment at all: he must not let himself think of her, not allow the memory of her lips and eyes to influence him.

"Why, it was getting late. Where was Charlie?"

He hammered on his door, which was bolted, and called him loudly: "Raymond, come over

to mess, won't you? The midday gun will go, if you don't look sharp."

"For God's sake, leave me alone!" was all the answer he got.

"What's the matter with you—seedy? Shall I send the doctor in?"

"Oh, damn it! leave me alone!" and Ellis went out, wondering what could have happened to good-natured Charlie. He put on a sun helmet and strolled over to the mess, which lay just across the glaring sun-backed road.

"*Wheu-gh!* it's hot," he said, as he stepped into the verandah. "I shouldn't care to walk far in this weather."

Soon afterwards Raymond called for the fastest of his ponies, and catching up the nearest hat, which happened to be a little cloth cap, went out to wait for it. His bearer brought him a solah topee, but he struck it aside without a word, and when the syce who came up with the pony asked where he was to go for the Sahib, he told the man to go to Hell and wait for him there!

Then he dashed out of the gate, urging the pony to the top of its speed, while faithful Squib toiled and panted after him.

His one wish was to go fast, very fast, to feel the wind sing in his ears as he galloped on.

Some instinct led the pony to the race-course, where going was soft and safe. It was not a small course, and the pony galloped twice round it, while the sun blazed on Raymond's unprotected head and neck, and poor Squib, completely distanced, sat down and panted with his tongue out.

It was only the pony's trembling flanks and labored breath that prevented Raymond from going round again; but the tired and over-heated beast started for home of its own accord, and Squib came gratefully after. The pony was in a white lather when Raymond got in. He felt that he himself had not turned a hair. He wiped his face, which was perfectly dry—not a drop of perspiration—which surprised him. But he felt better; he had worked off some of his excitement, and could think a little quietly.

Meanwhile his wild ride had been noticed. Just as Ellis was looking over some papers at the mess, the commanding officer came in angry and excited.

"Ellis, what's the matter with that young ass, Raymond?"

"I don't know, sir," said Ellis; "he seemed rather upset by something this morning."

"Upset! he'll be killed by sheer folly. Now, have any of you got a wager on with him about tearing round the course full speed at midday with a tennis cap on?"

"That sort of wager would be murder," said one of the majors.

"If it isn't murder it's suicide. There was the young lunatic, I tell you, dashing along almost bareheaded in a sun that I felt through a topee and a white umbrella. What's the matter with him?"

"Did you stop him, sir?" faltered the latest joined—a leggy boy with the look of extreme youth so often seen in lambs and colts.

"Stop him! Do you think I was going to hunt him on foot? I shouted to him, but he never answered. Why, his very dress was a disgrace to an officer: a *jharun* coat—one of those beastly *jharun* coats—over his parade trousers."

This enormity seemed worse to the com-



manding officer than the risk Raymond ran of sunstroke.

"I'll go over to our quarters and see if he's come back. Will one of you send the doctor in case?" said Ellis.

"Doran is in the hospital with a fellow who has got D. T.," said the major. "Three Tommies are holding him down, I believe, and Doran's waiting till he's quiet enough to be treated."

"Send him a chit, then," and Ellis went.

"That's a new idea—committing suicide by sunstroke," said the latest joined.

"Don't you bleat about horrors you don't understand, you woolly lamb," said the senior subaltern.

Ellis found Raymond in a long chair drinking a peg. His face was a strange color, and the whites of his eyes looked red. Two empty soda-water bottles lay near, and, as Ellis came in, he called for another peg.

"That isn't wholesome in the morning, Charlie. What's wrong?"

"What should be wrong in this hole of a place? I've been for a ride, and I've got a thirst on me like a lime-kiln. *Ek aur peg lao.*"

Ellis was relieved to see that he took a very

weak one, but he swallowed it almost in one gulp.

"I know I didn't have a wet night of it yesterday," he said, "but my tongue feels like a bit of leather, and I've got a real burning stinger of a headache."

"Fever is what you are in for, I'm afraid."

"Most likely; I feel dry and hot all over."

"Go to bed, old boy. Doran is coming to look at you."

"All right, I'll go presently. Don't worry me; I'm quite done up. I don't feel as if I could move."

"You've eaten nothing to-day. Won't you have some breakfast?"

"O Lord, no! I couldn't eat; the thought of food makes me sick as it is."

About an hour later the senior subaltern came in, followed by Dr. Phil Doran, a little Irishman, with a wonderful brogue and a kind ugly face. He felt Raymond's pulse, put his hand on his forehead, and looked into his eyes.

"Primary meningitis affecting the pia mater—that's what you've got, my boy."

"Speak English, doctor," said the senior subaltern.

"Indeed, then, and it's sunstroke. We'll get him to bed at once, and I'll look after him."

"I wish there were not so many of you. I can't stand more than fifty in the room at once," said Raymond feebly; "and I've got to leave and go to Simla—I mean London—before—before——" His voice died away, and he looked puzzled.

"It's the mental powers of him beginning to fail," said the doctor. "Help me. Carry him into his room, Ellis—chair and all."

"I know I haven't been fighting," muttered Raymond; "but did I tumble off my horse this morning? I can't see anything but sparks jig-jig-jigging."

The doctor looked grave, and Raymond was put to bed in a quiet, darkened room. He tossed and moaned in high fever, while Doran, helped by Ellis, tried every possible remedy, but nothing availed to moisten the burning skin or cool the parched mouth out of which the tongue protruded, dry and blackened. Though his eyes were staring open, he began to breathe like a man sleeping heavily. Doran drew Ellis aside.

"It's a serious case," he whispered. "Has the boy a mother?"

Ellis pointed to a framed photograph on the mantelpiece. "He's her youngest, too."

"And are there any of his people out here?"

"None. Has it come to that?"

Doran nodded, as he wrung out an iced bandage.

As the day wore on, Raymond became wildly delirious, till it needed the strength of both the men to keep him in his bed.

"It's something he's wanting," said Doran. "You said a letter bothered him this morning. Can you find it?"

Ellis found Edie's letter in a pocket of the coat the poor boy had worn. The writing made him start, but he gave it to Raymond without reading a word. Raymond turned it over and over, and was quiet for a moment, but his eyes were dim and his mind failing.

"Read it!" he said, holding it out to where he thought Doran was standing.

"It's little you'll hear of it, my boy." But the doctor read it aloud.

The silly sentences which Edie had found so easy to write sounded terrible read slowly at the

bed of a dying man. And the other man who had loved her stood by his friend's pillow, watching his writhing agonies, and thanked God that he was freed from the girl, and need never see her again. Ellis' love for Edie died when Charlie Raymond did, and that was at sunset.

The boy's ravings were more of his mother than Edie, though towards the end he spoke of her.

"I tell you she wasn't worth it," he cried sitting up, while the iced bandages round his head unwound and hung upon his shoulders. "I vow she was not worth it, and I'd get over it, if it wasn't for the sun. I'd be happy too. It isn't her I mind. Let me write home. I'll go home. I've got leave."

Ellis gently held him down, and he struggled till he fell back exhausted. The delirium was succeeded by complete stupor, and he died unconscious.

His leave came at sunset.

"Now you'll not tell this as a romantic love story," said the little doctor, undoing the bandages from the quiet head that needed them no longer. "If this had happened in the cold

weather, he'd have taken a good ride and then eaten his breakfast. It's the sun that did it. Never tell that girl that the poor boy died of love of her, for it's not true."

Ellis was not likely to tell her anything.

## CHAPTER IX.

### EVA'S VISIT.

"Lame, impotent, conclusion to youth's dreams,  
How are ye ended, in what utter loss——"

PROTEUS.

WHEN there are two or three girls in a family, the youngest is generally the prettiest, and this is a rule which has very few exceptions.

Eva Trent followed this rule, and was far prettier than May, shorter and slighter, with curling hair—irregular, piquant features, and an almost startlingly bright color. Her manners and movements were still those of the school-girl she had been till a few months before, but she was gifted with a frank fearlessness that made her say whatever she thought, and this amused people. Mrs. Trent saw she was likely to be more popular than May had ever been, and she was certainly happier.

May had given up her own tastes and habits and tried as it were to efface herself, hoping to please her mother thereby, but Eva was

thoroughly selfish—such genial, warm-hearted selfishness, though, that her father and mother found it delightful. May's pleasures had often been curtailed to suit Mrs. Trent's convenience, but Eva insisted on going everywhere, and staying to the end of everything; yet always with such sweet brightness that even, as Mrs. Trent yawned in a corner, she would contrast May with Eva to the latter's advantage.

May was dearly fond of the sister she had last seen as a child of fourteen, and Eva was enthusiastic about Anstruther. They had first met when May and her husband came to spend Christmas with the Trents, and it was then arranged that, as soon as Eva could be spared, she was to pay a long visit to Maidanpore, where Anstruther was posted.

"I think, on the whole, I like Percy better than May," she said calmly to her mother after their guests had gone.

"Eva, dear"! said Mrs. Trent, rather startled.

"I know he isn't my sister, but he's my brother-in-law, which is just as good, surely. Of course, I've got a fund of real love for May that dates from the time I was four years old, but, as a mere question of liking, I prefer Percy.

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Mother, how is it," she went on, "May never seems to me to be quite at ease somehow? I believe I could get on better with her than you or papa, or even her husband does."

"That is nonsense, dear."

"No, I hardly think it is. May always was funny; even at school she never made friends properly. She doesn't live—she thinks and worries and vaguely looks for things that she won't find. She's got an uncomfortable sort of nature. I promised to go out early for tennis this afternoon; let's go and get ready at once, mother," and Mrs. Trent obediently went.

Meanwhile May, with her "uncomfortable sort of nature," was trying to settle down in Maidanpore. They were only there for the winter, and would be transferred, they did not know where, in the spring, but she was anxious to make the house look pretty, even for a few months. Anstruther did not see the use of this, he thought it rather extravagant, for he was not one of those people who feel the need of having pleasant things round them.

A white-washed wall was not a grief to him, as it was to May, and such opinions on decoration as he had ran contrary to hers. Often

when she was struggling with some arrangement of drapery, or fastening plaques on the wall, he would stroll in, watch her for a minute, and say in a tone of settled conviction, "Oh, that will never do!" which quick-tempered May found maddening.

"I wonder, Percy, if you remember the two classes of people who never ought to see anything till it is finished," she said, sharply, one day, when he had condemned, without hesitation, a group of pampas grass, palm leaves, and peacock feathers that was to enliven a dull corner.

Luckily, he did not know, and she checked her irritation. But alas for her hopes that they would be so much happier after marriage! They had now been married more than three months, and she was conscious that very little change had taken place in her feelings towards him. Custom had certainly made some trifles easier to her, but no sympathy had sprung up between them, they had no topics of mutual interest. That which was best in his nature she was unable to see, and what she thought best in herself he knew nothing of, and some-

times her impatience of this led her into almost scorning him, and this was bad for them both.

One day she had been reading "Dramatic Lyrics," and put the book down before Anstruther came in, knowing his opinion of Browning—an opinion founded on ignorance. Now, she was one of those people who have the habit, when they read, of marking any lines that particularly strike them, and this time there were two new pencil marks in "By the Fireside." When her husband came the book was pushed to one side, but still opened; and during an aimless wandering round the room, a favorite habit of his, he took it up.

"You oughtn't to leave a book open like this," he said, sensibly; "ink or tea or some thing might easily get spilt on it."

May agreed with him. He turned over the pages.

"There are a lot of pencil marks here looking very untidy," he said; "get me a piece of India-rubber, dear, and I'll rub them out for you."

"Please don't; they are untidy, but it's my own book, and they all mark something I like particularly—they mean something."

"Some do, perhaps, but not all, surely. Listen

to this: you can't have meant to mark just this?—

‘And I turn the page, and I turn the page,  
Not verse now; only prose.’”

“That’s how one’s life grows to be,” said May.

“And this,” went on Anstruther, bent on demonstrating the inanity of the verse—

‘If two lives join, there is oft a scar,  
They are one and one with a shadowy third  
One near one, is too far.’

I can’t see the point of that; can you, May?”

“I can and do. I’ve learnt to understand it thoroughly, lately.”

“How do you mean?”

“Nothing; at any rate, Percy, it doesn’t matter.”

“I shouldn’t think it did. But what’s this now? —

‘And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.’

What do you take that for?”

“For exactly what it says. We live our little lives, and sin, and ruin ourselves and each other, and are burdened with the weight of it all.

‘And the earth keeps up her terrible composure.’”

“It sounds fine, although I don’t quite see the sequence; but never mind. You’d better go and get ready if we intend to have any tennis this afternoon.” Now and again it struck Anstruther that sympathy, if not love, was wanting between them; but this thought came seldom, and he never dwelt on it. He was not imaginative and had no ideal of what married life ought to be: his love for his wife was such an obvious and well-known fact to him, that he saw no use in speaking of it, even to her. He was naturally self-contained and undemonstrative. May would have liked him to be passionate. She had married him not for her own sake, but for his, and she wanted assurances from him that his happiness was now perfect, but it seemed to her that his marriage had made very little difference to him.

Every morning he went off to his work in office, and she spent the whole day alone from ten to five; then, on his return, they went for a drive or a ride to some place where they would be likely to meet people. Oftener still his tennis flannels were sent to him, and they met at some

tennis party or in the public gardens. In the evening they never had anything approaching to real talk; May hated games, but Anstruther enjoyed them, and long hours passed slowly over chess, bezique, and even draughts. One of her troubles was that she had no piano; he had offered to get her one, but she had rightly said it would be a needless expense. Yet she resented his agreeing with her.

It seemed to her, as the weeks went by, that she was growing ill-tempered, and developing new and disagreeable qualities—little things vexed her, the long days spent alone made her nervous. Though she paid and received calls, they only wearied her; and sometimes the very sound of her husband's slow monotonous voice made her clasp her hands together in silent intense irritation.

Half this was purely physical, but it was none the less very real and hard to bear, and May was delighted when Eva came to stay with them at the end of January.

She had been busy for more than a fortnight, making the girl's room pretty. She had a feeling of almost superstitious love and tenderness for her younger sister. Eva should never do

what she had done—she would guard her from that: the man she married should be the man she loved, and no other. But Eva seemed to need no guardianship of any kind, she went brightly on her own way with an independence which astonished her sister.

Maidanpore was gay at the beginning of February, Edie Cracroft was to be married to General Scarew with great pomp and circumstance, the new improvements of the race course were to be shown during three days of sky races, and there would certainly be dances, if not balls.

Dighton Ellis was a great disappointment to Edie. He had answered her letter of dismissal by a formal note, so carefully worded that she had not even the pleasure of saying, "Poor fellow! he is furiously angry with me."

He made no allusion to Raymond's death, Edie only saw the announcement in the paper, and her vanity lost the gratification of knowing that the poor boy's fatal ride had been taken directly after reading her letter. She cried heartily for fully a quarter of an hour, and spoke very feelingly to her mother.

"Poor, dear boy," she said, "isn't it sad to think he was only two-and-twenty, and I did

so want him to be one of the groomsmen? You know they all ought to wear red uniforms, oughtn't they?"

All the available girls of Maidanpore figured as Edie's bridesmaids, in delicate silver-grey, a sombre color that they objected to, but which threw up the bride's white faille and moire silk, and showed well with the red coats of the groomsmen.

General Scarew, blazing in full dress uniform, with a double row of medals on his padded chest, had characteristically chosen for his "best man" a handsome brevet-major, instead of one of his contemporaries whose memory might prove to be inconveniently long.

Edie herself had selected the groomsmen, and maliciously asked Ellis to be one, expecting him to refuse, but he accepted at once, and the bad taste and attempted cruelty of this cured him of his last lingering feeling of admiration for her.

His wedding present, a strictly practical and unromantic silver salver, was another disappointment to her; any personal ornament would have flattered her into the belief that he



still cared for her, but no romance was to be associated with this uninteresting offering.

This was the first Indian wedding Eva had ever seen, and it thoroughly disgusted her: that evening she amused Anstruther and surprised May by the severity of her comments.

"It was wrong and disgusting," she said, with the calm crudity which characterizes the opinions of very young girls; "such marriages should be made impossible by law. That old thing a bridegroom, and the bride looking like his pretty youngest daughter. Miserable girl! how could she?"

"I know Edie Cracroft, I mean Edie Scarew, very well, dear," said May, "and she has counted the cost of all this and decided it was worth it."

"I hope I shall never meet her, then; fancy pretending to be friends with a creature who behaved like that. I should be very sorry for her, with the same sort of pity, and just the same absence of respect one feels for poor creatures who are driven by poverty to vice and crime, not a bit better." Anstruther looked startled. May gently remonstrated. "It's exactly that," persisted Eva. "I always have that feeling for women who marry old men, or young

ones either, for anything but the true reason ; it is wicked and should be as much recognized as other sins are."

Anstruther hastily suggested a game of chess, and May went quietly away with a sob in her throat and tears very near her eyes. Eva's strong words had wounded her, though the girl herself had not begun to suspect that her sister's marriage had been one of those that she so fiercely condemned.

## CHAPTER X.

### THE END OF EVA'S VISIT.

"She came and sat down silently  
Between the grey and grey ;  
The wet wind beat the leafless tree,  
And love was gone away."

J. W. M.

EVA had spent three weeks at Maidanpore, but was anxious to remain longer, and May was delighted to have her; life was easier with a constantly present third person, and Eva was a bright companion during the long quiet days.

But of late Anstruther had been able to leave office earlier, and she had been better amused and seen far more people than in any of the previous months.

"A brother-in-law is a nice nondescript sort of relation, May," remarked Eva once: "he is much politer than one's own brothers, and not so stiff as other people's, and one always feels at ease with him."

"I'm so glad you and Percy are such good friends."

"He's very nice. It seems to me, judging from the sort of men one meets out here," said Eva, with a quaint air of disdain, "that you have been very lucky."

"Luckier than I deserve, I daresay."

"But not than you desire. May, dear, are you quite well? You don't look so."

"Perfectly well! Wait till you have the cares of even a little house on your shoulders, and see how worried you will look then. A new line is coming on my forehead, merely from the demands of the bearer; I am certain we none of us bathe in kerosene oil, but there seems no other way to account for the number of tins we are supposed to use."

"No, the look I mean is not caused by oil; tell me frankly, May, aren't you just a little tired of me? I shall soon have been with you a month, and I'm so afraid of being a perpetual *de trop*. Percy and you must be longing to be alone again."

"Eva, my child, your gift of chess-playing, apart from anything else, would make you an ever-welcome guest to Percy, and, as for me, I

should like to have you all the year round. Why am I such an idiot about chess?"

That afternoon May had a bad headache, so Eva and Anstruther went for a drive together. Now nothing ever happens but the unforeseen, and the people who look romantic lead the most humdrum lives, and commonplace men and women can suddenly break into startling fits of passion and show surprisingly new traits of character. May thought her husband was so plain and straightforward, perhaps dull was the adjective she applied to him, that she had learnt his nature in two or three months, and nothing he did could surprise her.

Perhaps it is charitable to believe that at times men have little fits of madness which should not be accounted against them after the fit has passed; certainly there is no other way of explaining some matters.

May did not love her husband enough to be easily jealous, and she was, by nature, thoroughly unsuspicious; but by degrees it seemed to her that Anstruther's manner, both to her and Eva, was undergoing a change. She first laughed at, and then despised herself for thinking so, but the thought remained, and each day

that passed strengthened her conviction. Eva was absolutely unconscious: she liked Anstruther, she was fond of him and frankly told him so, and she was glad that he liked her; for her, the matter ended there.

There never yet was a woman, however indifferent to her husband, who did not resent that husband's love for her being diminished in the least, and, incredulous as May was at first, it was impossible for her incredulity to last long.

Anstruther used to look back to the memory of that time, as a sort of dream, something that might have happened to another man, not to him; but it was real enough at the time. Every quality that he had loved in May, the subtle attraction that had drawn him to her seemed to him intensified in Eva. It is certain that, could he have first met the two sisters together now, it was Eva whom he would have asked to marry him. How it happened that the sober, steady man, who had honestly loved his wife, should so suddenly have become possessed by a brief passion for her sister, is one of those mysteries that no outsider can solve—he could not understand it himself. Of course he thought that no one could guess his secret, and luckily for Eva

she did not; but May knew, and puzzled day and night over her knowledge. After all, perhaps, it was not so much knowledge as imagination, and it would be hard to send Eva home for a mere jealous fancy; besides, an epidemic of small-pox had broken out in Dreean Drear Cantonments, and Mrs. Trent was relieved that her daughter should be away.

May would have thought and hesitated and said nothing, by far the wisest course, but for the visit of a really kind mischief-maker, famed for her sweet old face, and well-meaning, ill-advised attempts to settle everybody's affairs.

She was older than most women one sees in India, being fully sixty years of age. She lived with an excellent son, who appeared to be some ten or twelve years younger than his mother, and spite of a lifetime spent out of bonny Scotland, her Glasgow accent was still wonderfully pure.

This genial old lady, with a very shapeless black bonnet never renewed or altered, crowning her grey hair, came in one morning when the sisters were working together. After a few minutes she turned to Eva, smiling sweetly:

"I shall be asking you to leave us alone for

a short time, my dear," she said. "All the care and trouble of this world is not fit for the hearing of such a lassie as you—and it's your sister's opinion I'm wanting to know concerning a matter."

Eva went out of the room feeling somewhat cross, and May dreaded what was coming though she had not the courage to check it decisively.

"Yon's a bonnie lassie," said Mrs. Mactarten, "a bonnie lassie and a guid."

May had heard that when Mrs. Mactarten meant to be particularly meddlesome, she had a trick of becoming so Scotch as to be almost unintelligible, and this seemed true.

"It's anent her I was going to speak, and I'll no fash you wi' clavers, but come straight to the point. She's a grand responsibility to so young a woman as yourself, and if ye'll be advised by me, you'll send her back to her ain mither."

There was a simple directness about Mrs. Mactarten that prevented May from realizing the liberty she was taking.

"It is impossible for my sister to return home yet; small-pox has broken out in Dreeau Drear"



"Can you no' find another friend that would take the charge of her? I'd offer myself; but I am doubting that, in the same station, it would make but little differ."

The broad Scotch accent irritated May as much as though it had been assumed, and she spoke sharply :

"This house is the most fitting one for my sister to stay in, next to her own home, and I shall regret the day she leaves us."

Mrs. Mactarten's accent modified, and, with what in a more intimate friend would have been real kindness, she said : "You are a very young woman, my dear, and it's not you alone I am thinking of: they are silly people here, little worth the listening to I grant you, but a young girl's name should never even be breathed upon. You and your husband have your lives fixed before you, but it's all to come with her, and you must take care of the child."

May understood, and her cheeks flushed hotly, while she pretended to be puzzled, but changed the subject with a quickness that told experienced Mrs. Mactarten her words had had their effect.

That evening May dressed for dinner very

hurriedly, and went into the drawing-room, feeling that a few unpleasant words which she meant to say to her husband should be got over as quickly as possible. Eva was always a long time dressing for anything, so she did not fear interruption.

She found Anstruther reading a paper, which he did not lay aside when she came in: she stood by him, but he did not look up till at last she said awkwardly :

“Will you listen to me a minute? I want to say something.”

He put down the newspaper rather impatiently, and waited for her to speak; she stood twisting her wedding ring, and her words came very slowly.

“I don’t want you to be angry, I had hoped not to have to say anything, but I think I must now. You—you are—Eva is—at least I know, that——”

She stopped, almost gasping. No, she could not; it was a fearful thing to do, to accuse her husband of being in love with her own sister.

“What do you mean?” He guessed what she was going to say, so spoke roughly.

This time she spoke very quickly, not staying to choose her words.

"People think you are too attentive to Eva, and I thought you had better know it."

She sat down, leaning her head against the back of her chair, while her breath came quick and short. Anstruther's face changed.

"Whose nonsense have you been listening to?"

The anger in his voice roused her, and she spoke more firmly.

"What I heard agreed with what I thought; and it is best for you, and Eva, and me, that I should speak of it."

"What have you been thinking? Do speak plainly."

He was standing now, and she stood up and faced him.

"I think that lately you have changed; there is a change in your feelings that you must not dwell on, and as soon as it is safe for Eva to return home, she shall go."

"You are thinking ill of your sister, then?"

"No, I never could, but I am forced to think ill of my husband, which is almost as difficult, and even bitterer."

Her voice was level and expressionless, but her eyes filled with tears.

"It is nothing but a lie from beginning to end," he said, trying to laugh.

She was silent, reading in every line of his face the confirmation of what she feared.

"Understand me," she said, "if I had been engaged to you, and then Eva had come, I would have given you up to her, if she would have taken you, freely and gladly."

"I wish to heaven you could have done."

"It has been a mistake, a mistake for both of us, but we must abide by it."

He did not speak, and she went on quietly: "I would rather die than that Eva should know anything of this, and we are neither of us to be trusted about it. I could not bear to go on as if nothing had happened. I think I must manage to quarrel with her to-morrow or something of that sort."

"To quarrel with her so that she leaves here?"

"Yes, if I could do it."

"Before God, if you are unkind to Eva, I will never speak to you again!"

He spoke in a loud angry voice, and at this moment Eva came through the portière, the

door was open behind it, and she had heard what he said.

"You unkind to me, May! how absurd! I couldn't help hearing just a few words. Why, Percy! what's the matter?"

She looked from one to the other with startled eyes.

"Funny child! did you think we were quarrelling about you?" said May, struggling for self-control, and speaking in a very unnatural voice.

"Well, it sounded like it. Are you ill, dear? Oh! what is the matter?" For May's face was hidden in the arm of her chair, and her whole body shook with sobs.

"Leave me alone, leave me alone," she cried angrily as Eva tried to soothe her. "Am I never to have any peace because of you." And she stumbled to her room, shooting the bolt as she closed the door.

"Percy, do go to her: she must be ill," said Eva.

"Not I; she wouldn't care to see me," said Anstruther, sullenly. "Why, it's getting on for twenty past eight; we must have dinner."

Eva was silent, afraid to ask any more ques-

tions, but much puzzled and grieved, while behind the bolted door May's sobs slowly died away, as she walked up and down her room.

She was not jealous. She realized that she had none of the feelings of outraged love and anger, which she supposed would be natural to a woman in her position; it was only the pity of it that struck her.

She had married Anstruther for his sake, not for her own. She had been vain enough to think that he would find his life's happiness in her becoming his wife, and the thought of pretty Eva, longing for India, had also influenced her. Her father, she knew, could only afford the outfit and passage money for one daughter, when the other was no longer an expense to him. She had gone against, and set aside, her own desires and instincts, violated her own best feelings, only for this—this was the end. Her husband had ceased to love her, she would be forced to avoid her sister, where could she turn for comfort?

It was all so unnecessary, so cruelly unnecessary, she thought; this trouble of two lives might have been spared easily, had they only known. But that was fate. And, even sup-

posing he had been free when he first met Eva, would she have married him? And if she had done so, how his slow nature would have irritated and maddened her. In spite of all, May was thankful that her sister would never have to bear what she was enduring, the unguessed martyrdom of her life.

Nothing can be done to help it now, she decided as the tumult in her mind grew calmer—we must only bear it, Percy and I. Evie must never know, or mother—we must conceal it, just we two. Poor Percy—I meant to be so good to him—he asked me to make him happy; and now our linked lives are what he most regrets, and what I most deplore. And yet, whose fault was it?

After dinner, Anstruther challenged Eva to a game of chess, but she would not play. “I can’t even pretend to do anything while that door stays bolted,” she said, knocking at it timidly, but receiving no reply. “Does May think I have done something dreadful? She seems fearfully angry with me. Percy, do tell me what I have done?”

“You have done nothing, Heaven knows!”

“Then what does she think it is?”

"It's all my fault," said Anstruther.

"Surely not, Percy dear," said Eva, pitying his dejected look, and eager to comfort him: "she didn't speak of you, she said she had no peace because of me. But what can she think I have done?"

"Simply then, it's this—though I feel I am a brute and a fool to tell you, and I believe I ought to be burnt before I did, but you mustn't think you've given her any reason to be angry—it's because, that, all the while you've been here, I've learnt, I've grown to—— Oh! don't you see what I mean?"

"No, I don't understand," said Eva. She evidently did not, and he stopped, hesitating to cloud the clear eyes by the telling of such love as his for her was.

A bolt was drawn back, and May in a pretty teagown, pale and red-eyed, but smiling, came out of her room.

"Forgive me for being so cross, darling," she said, kissing Eva, "but I have been tortured with neuralgia all day long, and was ready to quarrel with anybody. I was vexed at your hearing me through the curtains when I did not



know you were there, that was all; make friends, dear."

Eva was too relieved to think much about May's excuse, and accepted it without question.

"Now you and Percy must kiss and make friends too, May," she said, laughing—"because he says it's all his fault, and no one can say more than that, whatever it is."

They looked at each other for a minute and then May said quickly, "He must do something else for me first. Percy, please call a *khitmatgar*, and tell him to make me a large cup of coffee, because I had no dinner. Have one too, Evie, and run the risk of it keeping you awake."

Anstruther went to his study, on pretence of work to do, and May alone, with her sister, talked and laughed till the girl was convinced that nothing serious had happened.

A few days later she went back to Dreean Drear, delighted with her visit.

## CHAPTER XI.

## TWO DAUGHTERS.

“Oh, a golden comb, for golden hair,  
And milk-white pearls for a neck as fair,  
And coral and amber,—all for me.”

WHILE May's married life, which had begun with genuine love on one side, and an earnest desire to do well on the other, was becoming daily more unhappy; Edie's, which seemed to have nothing to recommend it, made her radiantly content.

Given a marriage between an old man and a young girl, with no stronger feelings on his part than the desire of the eye, and none on hers save love of money, and you would expect misery to ensue; but the Scarews were a standing proof to the contrary.

Edie queened it at Nusnugger, realizing her bright vision of being the *burra mem* of a whole station.

The whole station had laughed and said unpleasant things, when it heard the general was

to be married a third time, and prepared to pity and dislike the girl-wife. This was all very well, but Edie made both pity and dislike impossible. She was always bright and charming, always very pretty and well dressed, and her behavior to her old husband was beyond all praise. Having discovered he had a terrible temper when roused, she was careful not to irritate him, and this was moderately easy, when a few leading facts were remembered.

He was kind enough when skilfully handled, and, about six months after their marriage, she had an inspiration that redounded to her credit.

Of all General Scarew's large family, the only one who had not married, emigrated or otherwise sought a separation from him, was his youngest daughter, Kate.

The last time he had been home, Kate, then about sixteen, had grown very fond of him, and, but for his marriage with Edie, the girl would have come out to keep house for him, on reaching her eighteenth birthday. However, he never intended to ask Edie to take charge of a girl so near her own age—he was too wise, he said to himself.

Kate was living with distant relatives who,

spite of the handsome payments made quarterly by the general, visited her father's sins upon her, and she was very unhappy. One day the English mail had come in at Nusnugger, and Edie, ever observant, saw her husband frowning and pulling his long white moustache over one of his letters.

"What's the matter, general dear?" she asked, perching on the arm of his chair. She always called him general with some softening word after it, Benjamin or Ben being impossible.

"Read that letter," handing her a tear-blotted scrawl. "Poor little Kate is having a hard time."

Edie read the letter, glanced at Kate's photograph on the mantel-piece, remembered that she was tall and dark, and would serve as an admirable foil or contrast, weighed the *pros* and *cons* of the matter speedily and made a resolve.

"General darling," she said, laying her hand over the paper he was reading, "you must listen to me for five whole minutes. I've got an idea, such a good idea!"

"All your ideas are good, my pet; but what is this one?"

"Poor little Kate is so unhappy, and it makes me wretched to think I am keeping the child away from her own home," said Edie, in her most virtuous voice. "Do have her out here, she would love to come, and she is so fond of you. Do have her, general dear, do! We should get on together so well; I feel sure we should."

General Scarew was delighted by this tender care for his daughter, shown by his wife who had never seen her, but still he hesitated.

"It is a very kind thought of yours, Edie, but it would be a burden and a responsibility for you if Kate came; remember she is eighteen."

"All the better, we shall be like sisters, and when general dear has been working hard all day, and doesn't want to go to a dance, I'll chaperon Kate, and he shall have no trouble."

The general wavered. He was very fond of his daughter and longed to see her; also, at the present rate of exchange, it would be economy to have all his expenses under one roof in India—a consideration that influenced him. Yes, the arrangement might be very satisfactory, and after all, if it did not work well, Kate could

easily be married ; he had had experience with what ease girls can be married in India, if they were not too exacting.

Eddie rubbed her cheek against his sleeve, with the petting gesture which was so habitual to her, and decided him with a final sentence.

"I can't make real friends with any of the ladies here, general dear—they are always so spiteful and look up your age in the Army List ; and when Kate was here, you wouldn't have to leave me all alone when you go to do business in that horrid office, and then we should have such cosy evenings. Katie and I should work, while you read us history."

Now if there was one thing that the general thought he did particularly well, it was reading aloud, especially history or some improving work ; the scale was turned, and Kate, with an abundant supply of pretty dresses, came out, as soon as her passage could be arranged for.

Much surprise was expressed at Nusnugger, when it was known as a fact that little Mrs. Scarew was going to have her husband's daughter to live with her, and most people decided it was a precautionary measure on the general's part. Of course he wished to curtail his wife's

liberty by forcing her always to go about with a girl some two or three years her junior.

Eddie took the wiser view of it, and knew that Kate, if properly managed, would prove a valuable ally and a complete shield against gossip and scandal and spite. On the day of Kate's arrival she sent the general down to the station to meet her, alone, preferring their first introduction to take place in-doors.

Kate had not made up her mind beforehand whether to like or dislike her young stepmother, but was slightly prejudiced in her favor, as she knew it was she who had persuaded her father to allow her to come to India. When she met Eddie, however, she fell in love with her at once. Eddie, in a white frock, had fluttered forward to welcome her, with both hands eagerly held out, and lips that felt like cool rose leaves against the girl's flushed cheek.

"Come and sit down in a comfortable chair, and have some tea at once; you are very tired, aren't you, dear? It is such a dreadful journey! But you shall do nothing but rest for the next week, and then we will see about amusing you. I want us to be so happy, and you'll call me 'Eddie,' won't you? It would be too funny for

me to be called anything else, and we mean to be real friends, don't we?"

"Yes, if—if you don't mind," stammered Kate, feeling unusually big and awkward and very conscious of being dusty and untidy.

"Dear thing, how could I mind? What a pretty dust cloak that is, such a new shape. You've got a lot of dresses to show me, haven't you? We'll have a grand unpacking day."

And, to General Scarew's great content, Kate felt herself at home and was ready to make vows of friendship at once. She proved to be the comfort of Edie's life, as well as her most devoted slave, supplying the element of youth that was lacking in the general, and brightening the house.

Her very appearance gratified Edie's vanity; for though almost handsome, she was dark, colorless, and rather largely made; perfect either as contrast or background for Edie's light figure, bright hair, and Dresden china face.

Scandal against Mrs. Scarew was now silenced, the general's wife and daughter were never apart, and one could not praise the other too highly. General Scarew was more than



ever convinced of the advisability of there being some thirty odd years between the ages of husband and wife.

At long intervals, when she had nothing to do and half-an-hour to spare, Edie would scribble hasty letters to May Anstruther, expatiating on her own happiness and good fortune, the generosity and amiability of the general, and the many good qualities of Kate.

"I know you pitied me when I was married—May, confess you did," wrote Edie once, "but I wish you could come and see me now, for even you would envy me. I've got such a lovely house and more dresses from home than I ever had in my life before, and oh, you should see the diamond bangle the general gave me last week because it was his birthday; wasn't it sweet of him? Kate's such a dear girl, we are the very greatest friends; honestly I'm quite grateful that I didn't marry Dighton Ellis. Things always seem to turn out for the best. I understand now how much I should have hated to be poor. Did you know that we were once engaged for quite a time? I wonder if he ever thinks of that now? I should so like to know. You might find out, would you, dear? Dø!"

and so on. May finished reading the letter with a feeling of sharp irritation, and tore the thick note-paper, bearing the crest and motto of the Scarews, '*Amor et Veritas*,' into tiny pieces. She knew Edie better than most people did, and therefore liked her less. Diamond bangles, she thought, and the general and Kate Scarew combining to pet and spoil her, while Charlie Raymond's headstone has just come from Calcutta and will be put up to-day; and Dighton Ellis has lost his faith in women, at any rate until he meets some nice girl who will convert him. Yet she is happy, will be happy in her own way, whatever happens, while I——

Perhaps she was supersensitive, but she was certainly not happy. Anstruther's work had kept him in the plains that summer, and like a good wife, she had stayed with her husband the whole hot weather, refusing to visit her mother at Simla. She could compel herself to do her duty, but she could not force herself to be happy, and it was a time of trial to her. The memory of Eva's disastrous visit to Maidanpore soon became an unpleasant dream to Anstruther. His fit of madness had been a very brief one, and he heartily repented of it, but May

found it impossible to forget. He did not know this, as his perceptions were not quick, and May did her best to hide her feelings, but that memory was a barrier between them, which months of the closest intercourse could not break down. She was again to him the one and one only woman he loved, and, as he grew to understand her a little better, he showed her this more; his manner became more tender, which only seemed to her a proof that he was trying to make her forgive, if she could not forget, what had happened in February.

The long hot weather passed slowly away, and striving to adapt herself to a man for whom she had never had heart-felt love or sympathy, and whom she now no longer honored, May felt that the burden of life weighed heavily on her.

She was not ill, but she was weak and never well. The days brought weariness, and the sleepless nights brought pain; during the hours that she was alone, the sudden opening of a door, when a servant came in, made her start and almost scream with nervousness. Anstruther had a peculiar flat voice, lacking timbre and vibration, an unsympathetic heavy voice, which,

spite of her good resolutions, grated painfully on his wife's nerves.

If he began to tell her anything, she longed to beg him to be silent, but his long silences irritated her more than his speech.

Only occasionally was he able to guess her state of mind, for she had a great deal of self-control, and he only saw what lay open before his eyes, but he did his best to make her happy.

"Percy, if you were another man, and I another woman, and neither of us were so perverse, we should get on beautifully," she once said, laughing, and her husband thought her spirits were improving, and saw no meaning in her words.

The burning winds and hot breathless days ceased at last : first came comparative coolness, then the absolute cold of a Punjab winter. That winter brought May the greatest happiness she had ever known, and showed her she was not the cold-hearted woman she had taken a morbid pleasure in fancying herself to be. Her baby was more than a joy to her, it was an absorbing interest that filled and made beautiful all her once lonely hours, and a revelation of love and

delight to a nature not rich in love, either given or received.

It afterwards seemed to her that it would have been natural if her husband and she had grown more united through their affection for the child, but on the contrary, the little soft hands seemed to hold them apart, or rather to draw the wife from the husband. For one thing, Anstruther was disappointed that the baby was a girl, it ought to have been a boy—his mother had hoped it would be a boy; it was usual in his family for the eldest son's eldest child to be a boy; and May was perversely glad to have departed from this custom of generations.

Then, again, Anstruther was very much ruled by habit. The winter before he had scarcely spent an evening out of his own house, except when he went to a dinner party with his wife; but during her illness he had dined at the Club, that the house might be quiet for her, and he continued to do so as a matter of routine. Evenings at the Club were pleasant to him; for, spite of his anticipations, he had not been transferred from Maidanpore, and had made many friends there. He was rather popular among men, for,

though he was not amusing or particularly talented, he never talked horse, polo or shikar, and rarely "shop," so he was a good listener to other people's discourses on all these subjects. Whist was another attraction to him: he became one of a little set of devoted whist-players, and his wife never tried to keep him at home.

They soon grew to be very independent of each other, for their lives had never really joined, only gone on side by side, and division was easy. Anstruther took up the old routine of his bachelor life, and May's baby made the days busy and happy for her. No word was ever spoken against them, though they were but little together; this was less noticeable, because May seldom went out, and her husband was rarely seen to speak to another lady.

In moments of bitterness May often found herself thinking she had thrown her life away for a mere fancy, had deliberately spoiled her own happiness and not made her husband's; but her child was a dear consolation. It was impossible for her to wholly regret the marriage which had brought her this happiness. People were puzzled by May's indifference to society; she was far too young and too pretty, they said,

to shut herself up, but she never thought so. She had left off dancing, half willingly and half because she did not think it worth while to argue the point with her husband, who was narrow-minded. Tennis parties were no pleasure to her, and dinners were absolute pain, for she was haunted by the thought that the baby might be crying alone, or, worse still, being drugged with opium, and she was a very dull talker in consequence. Although the baby was so much to her, it certainly prevented her from either finding or giving pleasure in society, and this vexed her husband. He resented it, and often told her how much he regretted it; though, if she had devoted herself to being bright and lively, enjoying every little thing that was going on, he would have felt pained and disappointed, and preached her a sermon with the family hearth and the baby's cradle for text.

It was a peculiarity about May's husband that, whatever was done, he wished undone and done in another way.

The baby had been a proof of this from the first. She ought to have been a boy; he rarely spoke of her without wishing she had

been. As for his wife, he would not have liked to change her completely—he only desired in her a different temper and another sort of nature; he used to tell her so, and she would invariably answer that she wondered why he had married her.

Her former enemy, Mrs. Mactarten, was always to the fore during the hot weather. She never left her son; people said she was afraid Frazer would hastily and recklessly get married if she took her eye off him. But this was slander. Unfortunately for May, the old lady was interested in her baby and gave her much good advice on the subject which she was careful not to follow.

Now, though May loved the baby with a devotion which surprised Anstruther, she was not one of those mistaken mothers who delight in telling tales of infantine illnesses wherever they go; Mrs. Mactarten gloried in such stories, and May dreaded meeting her, for she was always warning her to beware of some humiliating ailment which May was convinced *her* baby could never suffer from. She had a habit of turning to her at a garden party or anywhere among



people, and saying, in her loud Scotch voice, something of this sort :

"I've been thinking, Mrs. Anstruther, that that bairnie of yours must be near her teeth. Now you must watch her ; it's just a most important time. I'll come over and look at her to-morrow. I noticed how cross she was yesterday. It's just lancing the gums the poor wee thing needs maybe."

"Baby isn't six months old yet," May said sharply, "and if all her teeth were to come through at once, she shouldn't be lanced ; it's a relic of barbarism hurting a child like that, and she's never cross with me."

"It's her diet, of course, that needs watching," went on Mrs. Mactarten quietly ; "barley water's a grand thing, but you must just use common-sense as to what suits the bairnie. Now when my Frazer was teething, the way he throve on beef-tea was a marvel."

May watched the grey-headed Frazer playing tennis, and felt very sorry for him.

"Eczema is a thing to be guarded against," went on the terrible old lady ; "now remember zinc ointment will often cure it gradually,

whether it's moist or dry, but if it forms a scab, you must just——"

May got up and walked away. This was more than she could bear. She thought of her baby's soft pink limbs and satin skin. Eczema—ugh! She would certainly never speak to Mrs. Mactarten again. But that lady bore no malice, and the next day May received a parcel of home-made confections, called, in the note that accompanied them, "baps," with precise directions about mixing them in milk and administering them to "the bairnie."

May gave two to her dog and the rest to her ayah. The hot weather was certainly affecting her temper. The hot weather comes early at Maidanpore, and the baby evidently felt it, while May was tortured with fears that her darling would fall ill. Mrs. Trent and Eva went up to Simla at the first signs of heat, and from that pleasant place wrote urgent invitations to May and the baby. May was delighted by the thought of getting away, and consequently talked of it to her husband with great caution.

"I had a letter from mother this morning," she said after dinner; "she actually asks me

and baby to spend a month or two with her. Isn't it absurd ? as if I possibly could."

"I don't see why you shouldn't," said Anstruther ; "in fact, I believe it would be just what you want ; you said only yesterday that the baby was looking pale."

May was delighted ; but she knew something of her husband's nature by now, and went on opposing the plan. "Yes, she is looking pale, poor pet, and though I do all I can with curtains, the sand-flies keep her awake at night ; but then it's such an awful journey, and I doubt whether the *ayah* would go with me, and besides——"

"It's a most amazing thing," said Anstruther, getting up and beginning to walk about the room, "that you never seem able to do what other women find quite simple. Now in this case what is the difficulty ?"

"Of course, if you really wish it, I will do my best ; but I am afraid you will feel lonely."

"Not at all," he said, though if she had shown any eagerness to go, he would have drawn pathetic pictures of his loneliness and desolation. "I shall go to the Club a good deal, and get on beautifully ; besides it will be

worth anything to feel that you and the little one are out of the heat."

So it was settled, and, during the ten days before she left, she found herself able to be unusually tender to her husband. A little separation can be a very blessed thing at times.

## CHAPTER XII.

### ONE WOMAN'S MISERY.

"I'm lost to gladness and to mirth ;  
I'm lost to all that's good to find :  
I lost my way, in the light of day,  
And left the god things all behind."

OLD SONG.

"EDIE, dear, will you have this couch put so ?"

"No, not quite that way, more towards the wall, and then you know we will have curtains looped over there and make a pretty corner of it."

Edie Scarew and her step-daughter were very happy and busy arranging their little house at Simla, and the general was left behind at Nussagher. Kate's fondness for her pretty step-mother grew into love and almost fear, when she saw how Edie could wind "General dear" round her little white fingers, and yet appear to be a helpless, petting girl with no ideas of her own. It had taken a great deal of persuasion to convince "general dear" of the advisability

of taking a house at Simla. For one reason, it was too far away : secondly, he could only get up there for a month at most, and, finally, it was an expensive place, and he was not noted for his liberality ; but in the end Edie triumphed as usual. She had grown a little tired of her elderly husband, though she prided herself on always making the best of life ; he worried her, and freedom was inspiring. Now he would not come up for three full months, and she had everything she desired in the way of dresses from home, a Calcutta-built 'rickshaw, a nice little house, and a good riding horse ; chief blessing of all was Kate, who considered that all she did was right.

"I have really been very fortunate," mused Edie, sinking into a comfortable chair and admiring a daintily-shod foot, which she put far out from sheer force of habit. "Kate might so easily have been disagreeable, or ugly, or of a style of looks that didn't go with mine. As it is, she's a treasure. I hope she won't want to get married this season, I should feel so flat with only the general again." Here Kate came in, laden with embroideries, which, according to

Edie's somewhat florid taste, were to be draped and hung about the room.

"Dear pet," said Edie, as she lay back in her chair, and watched the girl working hard, "what should I do without you?"

Kate was one of those convenient people, who are willing to do anything for the sake of a little petting, to pick much oakum for love or love's pretence, and Edie was quick to see this and profit by it.

"I've thought of such a dress for you, Kitty," she went on slowly, while Kate, on a step-ladder, with her arms high above her head, was struggling to drape the top of a mirror with graceful folds—"A little higher on the left, else it will go crooked. A grey dress, dear, clouds of grey tulle, with a plush bodice, or perhaps satin, yes, satin—plush makes people look too thick—and a panel of trails of laburnum, yellow laburnum is a lovely color, all tied together with yellow ribbons. I wonder if they could make it up here? It would suit you perfectly, and look so *chic*."

It was certainly easier to sit with a cushion behind one's head describing dresses, than to

arrange a room, and Kate was as much pleased as though Edie had been toiling for her.

The first time that May and Edie met again was on the Mall. May and her sister were walking with their 'rickshaws behind them, when Mrs. Scarew in a green dress, bonnet, and parasol, which had the effect of making her face look like apple blossom, came quickly past. She stopped her *jampanies*, and held out two little green hands, saying appealingly to May, who did not at once recognize her,

"O May, you don't mean to say you have forgotten me! Have I grown such an old, old woman as all that?" Then, as May came nearer, "You darling, how nice it is to see you again! Have you been ill? You look quite old; I'm sure it's I who ought not to have been able to recognize you, instead of the other way round. How is your husband, and where is he? Mine's in the plains too and quite well. I'm just going to post a letter to him now. I never let any else post his letters; I always do it my own self—it seems to bring him closer to me, I think; do you? Are you staying with your mother? I will come and see you as soon as I have a minute of time, and you will come and



see my house, won't you? It's such a dear little place, the 'Pine Trees,' and not a bit out of the way. Is that your sister? How do you do? She's a pretty girl, but rather in your own style; your coloring is so very much alike. Now, Katie's quite different from me, which is always nice. She is my daughter, you know. I told you we were the best of friends, and she is two years younger than I am. You and she will get on beautifully, Eva. I must call you 'Eva'—I could not possibly say 'Miss Trent' to May's sister. I am sure you will suit each other. It sounds absurd for me to talk of my daughter, doesn't it? But you have actually got a real one, haven't you, May? A baby, I mean. I saw it in the paper. Is it pretty? You must show it to me some day. And now I won't keep you waiting any longer. Good-bye, dear. *Chello!*" This last to her *jampanies*.

It must not be supposed that Edie spoke in one unbroken stream of chatter, like Mrs. Nickleby of blessed memory, but both May and Eva had said little worth the noting, and the spirit of their talk is best expressed by giving her share of it.

"What a little goose," said Eva sweepingly.

"I think she is good-natured ; but her marriage has spoilt her. She never used to be so silly, only she was always thoughtless," said May, thinking of Charlie Raymond's grave. She was one of the few who knew the real story of his death. Ellis had told it to her in confidence.

"Who is that ?" she asked, as Eva bowed to a tall, striking looking man.

"Mr. Hewden, an artist, who has been travelling all over the world, and is going to spend some time here. I don't really know him, he has only just called, and he goes out very little. I believe there is some story connected with him, but I don't know what it is."

Fred Hewden, artist, and man of means, aged something less than thirty, had a sadder story connected with him, or rather with his wife, than falls to the lot of most men. In India the facts of the case were unknown and only guessed at—guesses that were very far from the truth, which was this : Agnes Hewden was older than her husband, and she was one of those women who always look more than their age. Fred Hewden's marriage, he being then

only six-and-twenty, was a great surprise to his people, and they charitably suggested that his wife's evident love for him had been his only reason for marrying her. Hewden himself had been startled when he realized how far he had gone, but he characteristically let matters drift as they would. Agnes had none of the beauty that Hewden was so quick to admire and appreciate ; at times indeed she might have been termed, what Hewden in his bachelor days had called "that wicked anomaly, an ugly woman." Tall and thin, almost to gauntness, with a dead white skin, strongly-marked features and deep-set shadowed eyes. She never tried to improve herself by careful dressing, and her one beauty, a quantity of thick dark hair, was drawn away from her face, and fastened into as small a compass as possible at the back of her large head. The one element of her nature, which most struck her friends, was her power of sympathy ; her sensitive, highly-strung nature seemed able to see with another's eyes and feel with another's senses. She had no secrets of her own ; but to compensate for this she was burdened with those of other people. Hewden had been first drawn to her by having

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a love trouble to confide, the five years of difference between them making her seem to him immeasurably his senior. Then, by some means—who can tell why half the marriages in this world take place?—he grew to need more than sympathy from her, and they were married.

Her appearance was an artistic grief to him every time he looked at her. Her moral atmosphere was too high and pure for an ordinary man to breathe for long with comfort; she set him on a pedestal, as it were, and insisted on looking up at him, which gave him the unpleasant feeling of an impostor expecting to be found out. In fact, many qualities, which had been precious before marriage, proved almost intolerable in her after she had become his wife.

For instance, she was so morbidly sensitive, it seemed too high a price to pay for a sympathetic nature, a few careless words were worse than a blow to her. As for her gift of sympathy, no man can be perpetually confiding in his wife, and the things that chiefly irritated him were not of a kind that he could tell her, seeing they were caused by her. The position of each towards the other was strained and un-

healthy, though time would probably have bettered it, but for a most unfortunate circumstance.

One morning Agnes was returning from her husband's studio, which was some little distance away from their house in Kensington. Crossing a very crowded road alone was always a terror to her. She had asked her husband to walk back with her, but he was too busy, and said so, not very kindly. She stood for several minutes at the kerb stone, waiting to cross, but the cabs and carriages rolled quickly past, and she was nervous and could see no policeman.

"I'll take yer over for a penny," said a voice at her elbow.

There stood a little boy, rather ragged and not very clean, perhaps one step above a crossing sweeper, but certainly not more.

"Tell me when to cross, and I'll give you sixpence," said Agnes, smiling at the eager little face.

The child watched the tide of traffic till a slight lull came.

"Now," he said, leading the way.

Agnes, who never moved quickly, was following, when a hansom, the horse of which seemed

to be quite out of control, dashed round a corner. She drew back in time, but the boy was startled by the driver's sudden shout; his foot slipped, and the horse and cab passed over him. The usual crowd of people, who knew by instinct when an accident has happened, gathered round his little writhing figure, and Agnes, who stood nearest, came forward and supported his head against her arm. It was plain no doctor was needed, for a wheel had crushed the child's chest, and one side of his face was terrible to look at, broken in by the horse's hoof. He was not quite dead, as a few short gasps and convulsive twitches showed, but in two or three minutes they ceased, and Agnes was conscious that some one took the body out of her arms.

She never knew what happened afterwards and how she reached home. Wherever she looked she saw only the crushed, bleeding face and the spasmodic movements of the agonized limbs. His blood had stained her dress, and she felt as though the marks would be found on her heart too. Cruellest torture of all was that she was haunted and fevered by the idea that, had she been quicker, she might have caught the child back and saved him.

Hewden found the story difficult to understand in the way his wife told it, and he failed to see any reason for her being so deeply moved and excited. "Depend upon it, it's the best thing that could have happened to the poor little fellow; he'd have grown up into a thief or worse, most likely," was all the comfort he gave her, and Agnes thought of the mutilated body and shuddered. Two days later she was writing a letter at her husband's dictation, a favorite occupation of hers, when as he looked up to know if she was ready for the next sentence, he saw a strange change in her. She was sitting with the pen still between her fingers, but not writing, her eyes were fixed, and the pupils dilated till the whole iris looked black, while her face was a sort of pale grey color. He sprang up to catch her, thinking she was about to faint, but her figure remained rigid, and in a minute or two consciousness returned, without her knowing she had ever lost it, and she repeated the last words she had written:—" 'hope soon to hear from you about it.' What comes after that, Fred?"

Hewden said nothing to startle her, and tried to fancy it a trifle, but more than one re-

currence of the same state alarmed him, and he privately consulted a doctor, who confirmed his worst fears. Is it merciful or merciless, that those attacked by the graver form of epilepsy, often do not know that they are ill?

At first Agnes was surprised that her husband's manner to her was invariably tender, and that a doctor came to see her so often; but little by little the fatal disease sapped her health and affected her brain. The hereditary curse of epilepsy was in her family, and the shock she had undergone called it into active life; her intense sensitiveness hastened the inevitable end, and in a comparatively short time after the first seizure, Hewden found that his wife needed not only treatment for epilepsy, but care and restraint for insanity. It was a terrible blow to him, and having made arrangements for the comfort of the woman who no longer seemed to be his wife but an evil spirit, that looked through the eyes of Agnes, and spoke with her tongue, he left England. He was a good man to the best of his power, but not a strong one, and such love as he had felt for her before this change came was lost in the terror and repugnance with which he now regarded her; her death would



be a deliverance for which he could have prayed had his conscience not been a little too tender. Poor Agnes, playing with stones and flowers, in the high-walled garden, beyond which she never went, would have prayed for her own death, or even have compassed it, could she but have known.

Hewden travelled in America and Africa, and might have settled down in Australia for a year or two of sheep farming, as a complete change from anything he had ever known before, but that the thought of the East attracted him, and he came to India. He was rich enough to go where he pleased, and stay in any place so long as he chose, and he spent his time looking for change and distraction. England was the one place he shunned and dreaded. Whenever he thought of it, there rose up before his eyes the memory of the last time he had seen his wife—his mad wife. The tall gaunt woman, wasted by illness, was sitting on the grass, making a daisy chain and babbling to her attendant. For long after Hewden could not look at a happy child without recalling this terrible mockery of childhood.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## A THUNDERSTORM.

"Re-issue words and looks from the old mint,  
Pass them afresh, no matter whose the print,  
Image and superscription once they bore."

R. BROWNING.

As the weeks went by, Eva Trent thought that Mr. Hewden was not such a hermit as she had been given to understand ; on the contrary, she saw a great deal of him, and he became less gloomy and grew positively cheerful. Now that she knew him fairly well, she used to wonder, in a purposeless girl's way, what his story was. No money trouble certainly, or he would not be living so easily at Simla and earning nothing ; no dishonorable action, she was ready to vow, that he never had done and never could do anything to be ashamed of.

What would it be then ? Some disgrace connected with his family ? But he spoke freely about them to her. His father was dead, and his mother lived in Norfolk in the house that was

his, which he had never cared to inhabit. "I always preferred to live in London, until——," he had said once, and then stopped just as Eva was hoping to hear more; she lacked courage to ask "until when?" And he changed the subject.

Brothers he had none, only one sister, of whom he was very fond, who had married a well-known lawyer. No trouble about her, certainly. And Eva was peculiarly reluctant to think that he was married or a widower.

Hewden's old habit of letting things go as they would, began to overpower him again. He could feel that his respect for Eva, his respect for his own honor, and his lingering loyalty to that haunting spectre of the woman who was his wife, all urged him to leave Simla, but still he stayed.

Eva was one of those fortunate beings whose beauty grows on their friends. One never became accustomed to her bright face and clear eyes, or grew tired of them; and physical beauty had a real power, an exaggerated influence over Hewden. Almost every leaf of his sketch book showed little studies of her, the outline of her profile—the set of her head, the way her hair grew—soft and curly at her tem-

ples, her slender arms and hands were all to be found noted there, as well as more finished sketches of her face and figure.

May's coming to Simla had been a disappointment to Eva, instead of the delight she had expected, for her sister seemed changed, and it was no longer possible to talk to her, and tell her everything, as she had done before. In truth, May did not feel very sympathetically disposed towards Eva; although her unlucky visit to Maidanpore had taken place more than a year ago, May, who had the unhappy faculty of never forgetting, could not be the same to her sister in spite of good resolutions. She knew that Eva was absolutely innocent and ignorant of what happened, but she felt her sister had been the means of convincing her that she had made the greatest mistake any woman can make. To marry a man because he loves you and asks you to make him happy, is, from a certain point of view, an act of self-denying nobility: but to do this and fail in contenting the man, in so much that he prefers another woman, is distinctly humiliating, and, regarding Eva as the cause of her humiliation, May was not affectionate to her.

She was mistaken. Her husband had returned to his old allegiance the more devoutly for having left it. But this she failed to realize. To make up, as it were, for this loss of Eva, May and her mother found themselves nearer together than they had ever been before ; the baby had a fervent worshipper in its grandmother, and Eva felt a little lonely.

She was not a baby lover ; she lacked that instinctive tenderness which draws a young girl to a young child, and gives her a new feeling of love, a faint shadow of the dear reality that will perhaps come to her some day. Her little niece rather frightened her. She was afraid of dropping her, or hurting her if she even touched her. Seeing her mother and May so much together made her feel misunderstood and unappreciated, and strengthened the interest she took in Hewden and his secret sorrow.

He was a contrast, both in appearance and manners, to the men, most of them soldiers, that she knew ; he was tall, but carried his head with that stoop forward so usual in artists, authors and men who have never been drilled. His wavy hair was long enough to be a joke in India, the land of "subalterns' crops," and he

had rings enough to be able to vary them according to his moods.' After Eva had known him for some weeks, she found courage to ask, half laughingly, if he were married. He answered very gravely, "Yes, my wife is in England ; she is very delicate," and said no more.

That night, when Eva was safe in her own room, she cried for hours, with the sense of false hopes and lost dreams, which were all the bitterer because she did not dare to acknowledge to herself the reason of her tears. They caused a headache, and she remarked *sotto voce* to her pillow that she was a baby to cry because she had a headache, and with this salve to her conscience fell asleep to dream of an exquisitely beautiful woman who frowned at her and said she was Fred. Hewden's wife.

Eddie Scarew used to talk of Hewden in a way that made her very indignant, though, obeying an instinct much at variance with her natural frankness, she did not show her feelings.

"He's an impossible sort of man, May, dear," prattled Eddie over her tea cup. "He hardly said half-a-dozen words the day he called, and though he's an artist, he never told me how

pretty my drawing-room was, though Katie and I have taken such pains with it, haven't we, dear? And there simply isn't a scrap of the ugly wall paper showing; it's quite covered with fans and Japanese things and bits of embroidery. Did I tell you I had some lovely new cushions out from home the other day just like flour bags, only plush. But I don't think Mr. Hewden can be an artist really. I wanted him to do my portrait, a big one—I know the general would give anything in reason—but he said portrait painting was not his line, and would not a painted photograph please me? That reminds me you can get photos done on porcelain up here, and I got such a sweet idea—I'm going to order a cup for the general, with my portrait on the cup and Katie's on the saucer; like an allegory, because we are always together, and one of us can't possibly get on without the other."

"It would be sure to break soon," said Eva.

"Yes, perhaps it would—that's the worst of it; but at any rate I mean to be done, photoed, you know, almost life-size: it will be such a pleasant surprise for the general."

Certainly at the end of the season the photo-

grapher's bill was a surprise for General Scarew, but not a pleasant one.

"But to return to Mr. Hewden," said May, fearing one of Edie's endless talks about her own beauty and good fortune. "He is really very clever. You should see the portrait he is painting of Eva—at least, not exactly a portrait, but what he calls a 'study.' He means to paint a picture of Caterina from it."

"Caterina? Oh yes, in Shakespeare. She was a shepherdess, wasn't she?" said well-educated Mrs. Scarew.

"No, indeed! Camoens the poet was in love with her. Didn't you ever read that poem,

'Sweetest eyes were ever seen'?

His picture is to illustrate a verse of that."

Eva went out of the room, feeling that it desecrated his picture, and the poem she loved for the picture's sake, to speak of it to Edie.

"But Eva hasn't got particularly large eyes," said that little lady, unconsciously opening her own till they were quite round.

"It is not only size but expression that's needed, and nobody could ever call her eyes small."



"Well, no. But there's another proof of how funny Mr. Hewden is. He told me he did historical pictures and things of that sort, so I said, if he liked, he might paint me as Joan of Arc or Grace Darling—I'm sure they are both historical, and it suits me to wear my hair down; but he said such subjects were beyond him. Katie, pet, I see that dear baby in the verandah, run out and speak to it."

Quiet Katie, who rarely talked, and liked to listen to her step-mother in admiring silence, went obediently, and Edie, very slight and young-looking in her dark habit, came to sit on the arm of May's chair.

"What are all the good people of Maidanpore going to do this hot weather, May—and, by-the-bye, is Dighton Ellis coming up here at all?"

"Captain Ellis thinks of coming up for a month some time in September."

"That's right; I'm very glad. But won't it be funny meeting him here again, now I'm married. Did you ever guess, you dear blind old May, that the season you were married, I was engaged to Dighton all the time?"

Edie stroked May's arm as she spoke in her

old petting way, and seemed to think this statement was much to her credit.

"I fancied something of the sort. Why did you break it off?"

"You funny thing! It was no good waiting to see if a fortune was going to drop down from the clouds on to Dighton! Just think what a captain's pay is—and then the general came—and I wrote Dighton a letter and cried dreadfully, and isn't it a comfort that things have turned out so well?"

"Have you told General Scarew about this?"

"No, why ever should I, dear?"

"Then I would rather you did not talk of it to me. Bring baby in, please, Katie. See, she has cut a new tooth since you last saw her." Half an hour later, when Edie was going, she sent Kate out to mount first, and said quickly, "You used to be held up as an example to me, May—you were always quiet when I was flirting; but it comes to the same in the end, for we are neither of us happy really," and there was a little quiver in her voice, which was probably affected, but seemed to have some genuine pathos in it.

Maidanpore was very unhealthy during that

hot weather, and Anstruther, though well himself, would not hear of his wife and child returning to brave the heat, so May's visit of a few weeks stretched into months. Afterwards she looked back upon this time as being the happiest she had known in her life; it was a very quiet happiness, for she cared to go out but little, the usual Simla gaieties wearied her. Her husband knew this, and it was one of the reasons which induced him to allow her to remain away from him for so long. He was only able to come up once for ten days, and May cried honest tears of regret when he went back to his work and the heat. A little separation between husband and wife can be beneficial, and with a distance between them, May was able to idealize Anstruther. His good qualities shone out in his letters, and the minor ones that vexed and irritated were obscured till she was strengthened to hope that the next cold weather would mark the beginning of a new and happy sympathy between them.

While she was peacefully contented, Eva had a trouble that no one suspected, and bore it alone; it was too intangible to tell in plain words to her mother and sister, and yet real

enough to grieve her and weigh on her. This had begun by knowing that she and Mr. Hewden shared a secret, which no one else in Simla, or even in India, really knew; for one day Hewden, feeling a need for sympathy, told her the story of his wife's affliction. No pathos was lost in the telling, but the girl who listened felt so much pity for the husband, that she had none to spare for the wife. She did not think of the loving woman, whose very tenderness of heart had hastened, if not caused, the blow that struck her down; but from her very soul she pitied the man bound to this living death. She was very young, and Hewden knew how to use words; without startling her, he contrived to give her the impression that he had never loved the woman he had married. Eva at once took it for granted he had married her for some high and noble reason, or else that she had entrapped him into doing so; looked at in either way, Hewden appeared to her in a favorable, lovable light. He asked her not to repeat what he had said, and though this secrecy made her slightly uneasy, she gloried in the thought that she was the only person he trusted. But the not speaking of it led her to think of him all the more.

He seemed such a hero, and there is always danger for a young and impulsive girl that hero-worship will become something more.

Meanwhile, far away in England, poor Agnes was growing steadily feebler and weaker ; the childish plays and babble were changed for bursts of passionate weeping and long hours of musing silence, as if the lighting before death slightly cleared her clouded brain. Her life was only a matter of months now, said the doctor, in the fortnightly letters he wrote to Hewden, and Hewden, when he first realized this, felt a temptation assailing him. His wife had been dead to him long ago ; she was practically dead ; why need he wait until the actual grave held her before he spoke to Eva ? She was entombed now. At first he put the thought out of his mind as too coarse and too terrible, but he was very much in love, and it forced its way back. Custom and perhaps a higher feeling demanded that he should wait till some time after Agnes' death, before asking Eva to marry him, but he did not feel strong enough to wait ; every man that spoke to Eva threw him into a passion of jealousy. If he did not speak now,

he might lose her, and this thought overbore all others.

Eva's mother had comparatively neglected her since May's arrival, and Hewden had seen her far oftener than Mrs. Trent had any idea of. When Eva rode, she was almost certain to meet Hewden : if she walked in the early morning, he was walking in the same direction ; and she herself hardly knew how much of this was by accident, and how much by arrangement. She had no desire to conceal anything from her mother. At first, had Hewden been unmarried, she would have mentioned how frequently she met him ; but she merely thought of him as a pleasant friend, and saw no need to speak. Afterwards, when his presence had grown to mean the whole world to her, she was afraid to speak.

One morning, early in September, Eva went for a walk before breakfast and met nobody ; she was very disappointed, and bitterly angry with herself for being disappointed. She did not fully realize the strength of her feelings for Hewden, but she began to feel uneasy because he was so constantly in her thoughts. "But then his life has been so tragic," she mused, excusing

herself to herself. "I never thought I should know a man who had a real story in his life, like something in a book; one can't help wondering about him, and how he feels. Poor fellow, it must seem as if all happiness was over for him, and he isn't nine-and-twenty yet. If there was only something I could do to help him or comfort him, but a girl is such a useless creature," and so on, and so on, till she had walked far and was roused by a heavy drop of rain upon her cheek and a roll of thunder among the hills. She had forgotten to bring waterproof or umbrella, but there was a little shelter shed not far off, and she hurried to it; a few coolies, who were its only occupants, made way for her, and she sat down on a green bench, and watched the dust on the Mall turn into brown mud as the rain fell. Somebody who was also without an umbrella came quickly towards the little shelter; it was Hewden, as she had half expected.

"So we have both been caught in the rain," he said, sitting down by her.

"Yes, and it shows no signs of stopping."

"Well, this place is dry enough, fortunately."

"These shelters are very useful; it is lucky that there was one so near."

"You were very early this morning; I was afraid I missed you altogether."

She felt a little thrill of joy; then he had been thinking of her, and hoping to meet her.

"The English mail came in last night," he said, after a pause, "and I heard from the doctor who has the charge of my poor wife."

"Yes! and how is she?"

"Failing fast; her life is only a question of weeks now, or of months at the longest."

"How terrible for you," said Eva.

"Terrible for me, indeed; but my life has been one long martyrdom, since this fearful illness possessed her; death is the only possible release and comfort to both of us. I cannot even seem to regret what will be a blessing to her."

Eva watched the rain outside. Her heart was beating in those quick choking throbs that warn a girl something is going to happen.

"You know what this has been to me," he said. "You know how deeply I have suffered, Eva. You are the only person who does know, the only one I have confided in, because I felt



you were superior to merely conventional notions. I wonder if I dare trust you still further, if you can prove yourself still more superior to prejudice?"

"Try to trust me," whispered Eva. Her hands worked nervously in the folds of her dress, and she was unable to look at Hewden, his eyes were too expressive.

"I will trust you; I would trust you with my life, with my soul. You must have guessed my feelings long ago; you must have known that, had I been free, I should have spoken before this. The happiness of my life is absolutely in your power, it has passed out of my own keeping. My past has been miserable, as you know, and you are the only woman in this world who could make me feel the years to come were worth living. Haven't you a word for me, Eva? Tell me you understand."

The color, that flushed her face from chin to brow, told him she understood. But she did not speak. She felt that his arm was round her, and his hand holding hers, but his words seemed too wonderful to be believed at once.

"The people here," he went on, bending closer, till she was conscious of his breath on

her cheek, "might say hard things about me, because I tell you this now; but I cannot risk losing my one hope, my one desire, for a mere nothing, a fanciful scruple. I have been unfortunate, Fate has been cruel to me, and you know I speak the truth, Eva, when I say that until I met you I never knew what love was. I was afraid to wait until, what people would call the 'proper time.' I distrust every man who looks at you. Darling, I could not wait. I love you so that you hold my future between your hands, to make or mar as you will. Do you forgive me for saying this? Won't you tell me at least that you are not angry with me, and that there will be a little hope for me when—after—I mean when I am able to ask you to marry me?"

She hardly knew if she was happy or wretched; it was all so sudden and so completely unexpected by her. She was half afraid, and tried to move away from him.

"No, no! not now!" she said faintly. "I cannot—I must not—it is not right!"

"My little darling, can't you feel that I love you far too well to ask you to do wrong. Don't tremble, child. You are not really afraid of me?"

Have I startled you by speaking too soon? But surely you can tell me if you care for me a little or not. If not, I must force myself to go away and not see you again; it must be that now, if you cannot say what I long for."

"Oh, you mustn't go away. I could not bear that. I love you, but——" The rest of her objection was silenced by his lips on hers, and after that she could not think of as him what he was, the husband of another woman, but only as her lover; her lover and her loved.

And so there was another secret for Eva to keep. After coming to an understanding, they said very little, and a feeling of constraint, almost of guilt, began to divide them. Hewden had seldom remembered his wife so vividly, as at the moment when Eva confessed she loved him. 'Spite of his exultation, he felt a traitor when he kissed her, and she realized—though vaguely—how different, how much happier it all might have been. It seemed to her that a miracle had been worked on her behalf, but a shadow clouded everything, and she fancied that the murmur of the retreating thunder, and the heavy fall of the rain, were the only fitting accompaniments to such a compact as they had

entered into. When the thunder-shower was over he walked home with her, in almost complete silence, and they parted without shaking hands; the memory of his kisses separated them from any ordinary friendly forms. Mrs. Trent scolded Eva for being very irritable during breakfast that morning.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### HOW ELLIS WAS COMFORTED.

“Youth, Hope, and Love were nestling in her heart,  
Like three sweet birds that cheer'd the summer  
earth,  
In Life's glad chorus taking equal part,  
Filling her days with music and with mirth.”

TOWARDS the middle of the season Eva made a new friend, and Simla gained a new beauty, for Madge Leslie came up from Kasauli to spend a few weeks with a married sister. She was one of those happy people who enjoy their pleasures three times over, in anticipation, realization, and memory, and therefore was always pleasing and pleased. A happy and pretty girl who frankly enjoys herself as much as possible has a peculiar and almost irresistible charm, and Madge's popularity was as great as the admiration won by her pretty face. She was very Irish-looking, with wide-set blue eyes, black lashes, a friend had described as being “a mile long and an inch thick,” a smiling—far

from small mouth, gleaming with white teeth, and a nose that decidedly turned up. Her sisters used to say of her that "she was only quiet when she was singing," and it was almost an exact description; out-door life was her delight, and she excelled in riding and tennis. A story was told against her that, shortly after she came out from Ireland, she startled a languid partner by saying that she could go head-over-heels down a long room and walk a few steps on her hands to finish the performance; and it is certain that once at a pic-nic, even though hampered by her habit, she jumped a rope held at over four feet. People never asked her how she spent her time. If she drew or read or worked, she was so intensely alive that her vitality seemed enough occupation. She never opened a book, and had been known to sew with her thimble on her first finger, but she could sing as tunefully and easily as a thrush, and had a sweet temper and a habit of bright observation which made her a charming companion. Sentiment she was thoroughly without; her horse, Brian Boru, and her big bull-terrier with his burnished brass collar, invariably called by her "Malachi-with-the-collar-o'-Gold,"

as though it had been all one word, she loved dearly; children always liked her; and she made friends with everybody everywhere. But she never flirted.

Her answer to the only proposal she had received in India had passed into a proverb among her family. The man in question had always rather bored her, and his impassioned eloquence puzzled her for the space of eight minutes, then she began dimly to understand and replied by inquiring, "Is it *me* you're meaning?" with a tone and inflexion that admitted of no reply.

She was the last of a long family, the only girl left unmarried, and she fully intended to remain so.

"Me, marry? no, never!" she said one day to Eva. "I am the last of us, and I'll be a scourge to my parents when they get old. It'll just suit me. Did I say 'scourge,' then I meant a stick or a staff, but 'deed I'll be both."

"Nonsense, Madge! You'll be engaged before the end of the season," said Eva.

"I will not that! Do you hear me?—I will not!"

"'Deed and then you won't then," said Eva, trying to imitate her accent. Mrs. Trent was inclined to be shocked by her, and described her as "bold," an adjective that Madge did not deserve, though she might have been called "wild," but Eva, according to her habit of doing what she liked, was a great deal with Madge, and her mother made no real objection. May used to watch the girl with a sort of wonder. She had not thought that anyone could be always so light-hearted. Baby May looked upon her as a bright new toy, bought for her special pleasure, a toy that laughed and danced and sang, and had real hair to be pulled; for Madge had the honest love for babies that was completely wanting in Eva.

The beginning of September was unusually wet, and Madge, who had infected Eva with a little of her fondness for exercise and gymnastics, induced her to have two long ropes hung up in a covered verandah. "You can swing on them and climb up 'm and do all sorts of things to keep you awake and alive in this mist's own weather," explained Madge, and much to Mrs. Trent's surprise the ropes were fastened up.



May was pretty far from wishing to be a match-maker, but she liked Dighton Ellis, and, 'spite of his poverty, thought him a man that any girl might have been glad to marry; it seemed to her, from what she knew of them both, that he and Eva would be beautifully suited to each other. Certainly at Maidanpore he had not paid her much attention, but that was so soon after Edie's marriage, he hardly could; this time things would probably be different. The morning that Ellis called he found Mrs. Trent and May sitting alone, Eva being somewhere with Madge; but before he went May took him into the verandah to see if the girls were there. They were there indeed, and Eva stood at the foot of one of the long ropes, while, at the very top of the other, her bright ruffle-haired head against the verandah roof, clung Madge.

"You must climb with hands and feet—hands alone are no good; work your feet and then it's as easy as falling off a log. Stand away, I'm coming down that rope." So saying she swung easily from one rope to the other and slid down hand under hand before she saw Ellis.

May, whose freedom of thought in some mat-

ters was balanced by strict conventionality in others, was troubled, Eva laughed, and Madge blushed a fierce crimson and said appealingly, "Indeéd, I'm not mad ; it's only exercise."

Ellis thought he had never seen anyone like her before, and a more distinct contrast to his lost ideal. Edie, with her little studied graces and *minauderies* it was difficult to imagine.

Madge was unusually silent, though Ellis stayed some time longer for the sake of looking at her. She sat in an uncomfortable chair, with her hands folded like a patient child, while "Malachi-with-the-collar-o'-Gold," the bull-terrier who never left her, leant his honest ugly head against her white dress, and glared at the stranger out of his blood-shot eyes.

When Ellis at last went, he could not have said how his old friend May was looking, or what Eva had talked about, but he vividly remembered a bright face, that was half-defiant, half-appealing, blue eyes, whose curled back lashes gave them a peculiarly starry look, and a fresh young voice that lent sparkle and brightness to the few commonplace words Madge had spoken.

Mrs. Scarew had been looking forward to

Ellis' visit with an interest that almost amounted to excitement. It had never entered her pretty head that an old lover of hers could possibly falter in his allegiance, however she might have behaved; and the absolute indifference of his manner to her piqued her sadly. She had not even the comfort of saying to May, "Do you notice how the poor fellow avoids me?" for he was sedately polite to her, danced with her occasionally, rode with her when she asked him, but was frankly not attracted by the little airs she displayed to him. Edie was not soon daunted, and tried many different kinds of graces, but they made no impression on him; she once ventured on reminiscences, which he received so coldly that for the only time in her life the little lady felt distinctly snubbed, and did not continue the attack. However, in spite of this rebuff, she had a charming season, and was very discreet. People might and did say that Mrs. Scarew was always surrounded by boys, but she had invariably several favorites, and there is safety in numbers; besides it was easy to explain the boys to her husband. "You see, Katie is a very attractive girl, general dear, and I can't play dragon and frighten away all

the young men who are polite to me for her sake—can I?" And so they were all pleased, and Edie prospered.

Madge Leslie thought Simla the most charming place she had ever known. "The people are so much nicer here than they are at Kasauli," she said naively, which sentence being interpreted meant that she saw Captain Ellis daily.

Of course, no one believes in love at first sight now-a-days. Still, even in the nineteenth century, it is sometimes to be found as true and as real as it was in the age of Phillida and Corydon—only our modern Corydons are generally a little ashamed of it. At first Ellis would not admit to himself the nature of his feelings. After his disappointment he had fully intended to believe that no woman was worthy of love, but Edie Scarew and Madge Leslie were so much unlike that they might have belonged to different worlds.

Eva, whose own secret had opened her eyes to other people's, was keenly interested in the little comedy, and saw Ellis' meaning before Madge herself did. She could not help envying Madge—everything was so open and

straightforward with her; she had no need to conceal her thoughts and feelings, no need to wait until death should empty the place she intended to fill. But there were drawbacks to Madge's sweet frankness, as Ellis found when he wanted to be serious or sentimental: she saw jokes when any other girl would have blushed and simpered, and found ludicrous second meanings in any tender speeches he dared to make. Half of this was affected, for, when Madge realized how very often and how much she thought of Dighton Ellis, she made it her duty, from sheer perversity, to laugh at and misunderstand him. It was like the "merry war" between Beatrice and Benedick, only this Benedick acted his part very ruefully and was better fitted for that of Romeo, but Madge would not be Juliet.

About a week before his leave ended, he met Madge at a dance, and during a waltz with her—she waltzed as well as she rode—he resolved to speak plainly and get his answer that night; but two go to every proposal, and Madge was not in a serious humor. Her dress was all white and very simple, but she was flushed and sparkling, her bright hair, radiant face and vivid

Irish eyes atoning for any other want of color. She refused to come to a cool corner in a dusky verandah, but sat down in a brightly-lit passage and looked defiantly saucy over the top of her feather fan.

"I've got to go down in a few days," said Ellis mournfully.

"So you said."

"Yes, I can't help talking about it. I do hate going so."

"The worst of the heat is over now, and they haven't had much cholera at Maidanpore. I don't like a man to shirk his duty," said Madge loyally.

"You know it isn't that!" cried poor Ellis. "As if I minded the heat or a cholera scare! But Simla is the only place I care to be in now."

"What a fearful confession! Fancy being so fond of the 'most frivolous place in India,' as they call it. I thought better of you, Captain Ellis!"

"It's not the place, but the people. I don't mean that. I mean one person—the one I care for most in the world."

"Yourself, I suppose, first person singular.

When I was in the nursery I used to be told it wasn't manners to talk about myself."

"I don't want to talk about myself. You know I mean you."

"Personal remarks are worst of all, my old nurse used to say. But to turn to something sensible, what did you think of the last performance at the theatre here?"

"It was skittles! But isn't it hard luck, I've been trying for ten days' more leave, and the C. O. won't see it."

"I too fail to see the connection. He and I must be equally stupid! The last play was skittles! But you've been trying to get more leave. Why 'but?'"

"Oh, please don't chaff me. It's no good ever trying to get the last word where you are concerned. I have learnt that."

"I hope you intend that for a compliment; it hardly sounds like one to me."

"No, I don't. I've got past the stage of paying compliments."

"Since you knew me, I suppose. I'm so rude and sincere that my evil communications have corrupted your good manners. But it's not for long this time luckily. I hear the next dance."

"Never mind ; it's only a polka—and you've promised to sit it out with me."

"Did I really ?" And Madge took out her programme and verified his statement. "So I did ; but small blame to me. I'm so sleepy and so hungry I should forget the Christian name of my own grandmother, if I knew it. Take pity on me and give me an ice before I faint."

"Wait a little. You can see down there that the refreshment room is fearfully crowded. I'll get you one after."

"Suré 'tis cruel of you to keep me nere waiting like this and me starving ; you can't expect me to talk any sort of sense or even nonsense under the circumstances, can you now ?"

"But you might listen to me just a minute," pleaded Ellis. "You never give me a chance of speaking seriously."

"Me never give you a chance of speaking seriously ? Indeed, why wasn't it myself who told you about feeding puppies with distemper on raw eggs—a first fact in natural history that you didn't know ; and weren't you the ignorant soul that didn't know the good an ounce of arnica in a pint of water does a pony's sore



back till I told you. And yet you don't call that serious enough? What ingratitude!"

"I wonder you ever care to give me a dance when you make fun of me like this the whole time," said Ellis, gloomily.

"'Tis the sweetness of my nature that makes me do it! You've been as glum as two sticks or else as cross as them, lately, and I want to improve you."

"Oh, if you only would," said Ellis quickly, catching her hand behind her fan, "for pity's sake don't play with me any longer, Madge! There is something I must tell you."

"There's something I must tell you," said Madge briskly, pulling her hand away, "and that is that three fat ladies have just come away from the buffet, so if we go quickly we shall find room. Get me an ice and then I'll listen to anything you like, short of a sermon or Latin verses."

Ellis was completely silenced and very angry; and when Madge was in her 'rickshaw going home, she cried quietly under the shelter of the hood. She could not help being flippant and teasing him, even when she wished most to hear what he most wished to say,

His chance came at last, when he least expected it. He met Madge at a big dull dinner party, where she was heartily and thoroughly bored. Two ladies had unfortunately failed to come, and poor Madge found herself suffering from the burden of an honor unto which she was not born, being taken into dinner by an enthusiastic middle-aged civilian, who talked at great length of "his work," and having a very solemn colonel with "a grievance" on the other side.

Ellis sat opposite to her and was amused by her frank yawns, which her gauze fan could not conceal, and the way in which she looked across to him for sympathy. As the stream of ladies passed out she whispered to him that she was "kill't intoirely" before she went on with her ordeal.

After the men came into the drawing-room he could not see her at first, then he found her alone in a corner of the glass verandah which made a sort of ante-room, and she welcomed him with absolute joy.

"You must comfort me," she said. "I've been made to feel a heathen, and an outcast, and a cumberer of the ground. Isn't it sad

when good people insist on being horrid? You see that girl over there with white eyes and a big head? she's been telling me that girls always deteriorate out here. I'm sure her manners have; and don't I feel what an idle, purposeless life I lead? I said, 'I'm quite happy, thank you,' and she said that was the grief and the sin of it, though I can't think what I've done to offend her."

"And so you escaped out here?"

"Yes; she turned for a minute to abuse somebody else and I almost ran. Oh, save me from her! Here she comes."

But the girl with the white eyes only passed on to the piano, and proceeded to play in a heavy-handed manner.

"Listen to her, do," whispered Madge. "I've heard of people taking piano exercise and rocking on the keys, but she's doing a parade, marching with ammunition boots."

"It's loud enough to let one talk comfortably, thank heaven. But tell me some more about this amiable young lady. Did she include married women in her censure of Anglo-Indian life, or only abuse girls?"

"Indeed, no! The married women are privileged. It's enough to make one wish to be born old, isn't it? I'm saving myself up for the rattling time I mean to have when I'm—thirty-eight," said Madge, glancing at a lively lady who was far past that age.

"Oh, the age doesn't matter a bit; you only need to get married."

"That's a comfort, with me ten months to wait for my twentieth birthday; it's only 'Wanted a husband', then in my case," said Madge thoughtlessly, and did not mend her unlucky little speech by blushing crimson.

"You would not have far to look for one," said Ellis, taking the plunge desperately. "Madge, do listen to me. You must now, you know. I've been trying to speak to you for days, only you never would let me. I fell in love with you the very first time I saw you, do you recollect, in that verandah at the Trents? Don't say you haven't known me three weeks yet, for time doesn't matter a bit, and I couldn't possibly love you more if I had known you all your life. Of course, I can't hope or expect you to say that you'll marry me at once, but if you'll only give me a chance, if you'd try and

think if you ever could, it would be all the world to me. I'm not worth much, I'm not worth you, darling, God knows ; but if you only could, if you would give me something to live for, something to work for, I'd be a much better fellow than I am."

He had managed to take her hands, and spoke in a series of vehement gasps. Any looker-on would have guessed what he was saying and she hearing, but the verandah was dimly lighted and no one noticed them. Her eyes grew unusually grave, as she said slowly :

"Do you mean it, or are you joking? I'll laugh at anything else you like but marriage is too sacred."

"I'm not laughing! Good Heavens, as if I wanted you to laugh! I was never so serious. Don't say 'No;' I could not bear it. Only give me a chance; I know I could make you care for me some day."

"Miss Leslie, will you sing?" 'The girl with the white eyes,' who was the daughter of the house, came up at this moment.

"I'm rather tired, please," said poor Madge, while Ellis understood how a would-be mur-

derer feels. "Yes, I see you are flushed, but I have heard you say that singing was no effort to you."

"Oh, no more it is, and I'll sing you something," she said jumping up, then, seeing the look on her lover's face, she found time to put her hand on his with a quick clasp, as 'the girl with the white eyes' led the way to the drawing-room, and whisper:

"I care now, dear. You needn't trouble to make me do it," before she followed.

The next minute she was carolling "Kitty of Coleraine," and Ellis, absorbed as he was in his new-found happiness, was able to appreciate the shocked expression in his enemy's white eyes, when the song came to its merry ending.

"I'm doomed to be prosaic, whatever happens," said Madge to Eva next day. "I used to think I'd have to be proposed to by telegraph if ever at all, because any one would be afraid to speak or write it to me, but this made me feel exactly like Miss Flora McFlimsey—

'So we were engaged, our troth had been plighted,  
Not by moonbeam, or starbeam, or fountain or  
grove ;  
But in a front parlor, most brilliantly lighted,  
Beneath the gas fixtures we murmured our love.'

Barring that, it was a kerosine lamp, which nearly went out in the middle—good luck to it!”

## CHAPTER XV.

## THE ORDER OF RELEASE.

"The dead is forgotten, thrust out of his life,  
And now he will marry another young wife."

EDIE SCAREW was cheerfully incredulous when Madge's engagement was given out, for she had salved her little soul with the idea that Ellis cherished a deeply hidden passion for herself. "I have known Dighton Ellis exceedingly well for a very long time," she said to Katie, "and though he and that Leslie girl have been a good deal together lately, every one could see that she was simply hunting him, and she is not the sort he admires. Why, she is enormous: look at her height. Yes, I know she is slight, but it is so masculine to be five-foot-seven, and Captain Ellis admires the *mignonne* and *petit* style. Are you quite sure, dear, that this silk blouse suits me? You see I like my dresses to fit just like a habit, and this fluffy frilly thing makes me feel square." May had enough good-natured malice in her to enjoy assuring Edie of



the truth of this report, and Eva, who disliked the little lady, was openly exultant.

This was a trying time for Eva, and, while Madge made happy confidences to her, she felt her own secret and conditional engagement weigh heavily; besides this the secret between them gave a feeling of restraint to her intercourse with Hewden. She tried to put all thought of Agnes Hewden out of her mind. It was horrible to wish for her death, yet she knew she should feel glad and relieved when she ceased to live; but she was very young, and had the happy faculty of never dwelling on unpleasant subjects. Towards the end of the season, a big fancy ball was given, to which all Simla went, and Hewden was induced to go; he wanted to see Eva in the beautiful dress he had designed for her, and she had begged him for once to break his rule of not going out. He was influenced by peculiar feelings—they prevented him from going to dances, while his wife was slowly dying in England, but they did not restrain him from making passionate love to the young girl who had already promised to be her successor. But on this occasion Eva pleaded,

and Hewden, to the surprise of all who knew him, went to the ball.

It was two years since he had entered a ball-room, and the subtle indescribable atmosphere influenced him strongly; the lights, the music, the shimmer of soft fabrics, the whispers in the air, the magnetic current of light-heartedness and sentiment all wrought upon him. Eva, too, through him, felt as she had never done before. Mrs. Trent was astonished and alarmed; the girl disregarded all her little maxims, and, with the exception of one or two intervals, seemed to spend the whole evening with Hewden. A species of intoxication possessed her; the delight of the moment outweighed any other consideration, and prudence was forgotten; no shadow of the unhappy wife, so cruelly dealt with by fate, dimmed her happiness. She could not think of Hewden as any woman's husband; he was her lover, whom she loved, and that evening opened new worlds to her.

When Hewden went back to his hotel, at about three o'clock in the morning, he was too excited to feel tired, and walked about his room for some little time before he saw a telegram

lying on the table; a glance showed it was from England, and he suspected the news it brought before he read it. It was from the doctor in charge of poor Agnes, and contained only these words: "Your wife died painlessly at five this evening."

He read them over three or four times. "My order of release!" he said slowly; "my order of release, thank God!"

The paper dropped from his hand, and he tried to realize his freedom. He was free to marry Eva, to go where he wished, to do what he would. He could return to England now—his reason for avoiding it existed no longer. Life would be fuller and more beautiful than he had ever known it to be. Think of Eva's sweet voice and bright lovely face in his studio, instead of Agnes' slow utterance and grim colorless features; that alone would make the difference between Earth and Heaven to him. How happy—how blessed he was.

Presently the exultation passed. He was physically very tired, and this weariness communicated itself to his spirit, and old memories assailed him. He remembered the first time he had ever met Agnes; she was looking plain

and sallow in a dark grey dress, but her soft voice had affected him like a charm. The words she had said when he proposed to her came back to him, and he recalled the very feeling of her hand, a thin—rather large very sensitive hand, not soft to the touch—how different from Eva's plump palm and little taper fingers. He had no photographs or mementoes of her—they had all been burnt long ago—but no picture could have brought her face more vividly before him than his memory did. To escape from it he took up a pencil and tried to sketch Eva's profile, but in a few minutes he had drawn a fearful face with Eva's curling hair, long lashed eyes, and pouting little mouth, and Agnes' high brow and large ill-cut nose and chin, and tore the paper up with a shudder. His lamp gave a flickering uncertain light, and, for the first and only time in his life, superstitious fears seized him. Agnes' hand in his seemed to be no fancy, but a palpable pressure; it was a living hand no longer, it was cold and stiff, as she was now, and she was not even buried yet. She died at five—that means about eleven o'clock in India—now it was four; she had only been dead five hours. Had they

taken the bandage off her chin, and were the weights on her eyes still? Was any one watching by her? Or had they left her alone in that bare room he remembered so well, with the barred window and the strong bolt outside the door.

She had died at eleven o'clock. Why, he had been with Eva then; he remembered having heard a clock strike eleven, as they sat in the dim light with flowers round them; the time was fixed in his memory because he had said the hours were like minutes when one was perfectly happy. He had been perfectly happy; while she, the wife of his youth, was dying. He was chilled and weary, and the fancy dress of richly colored velvet he wore seemed like a hideous mockery, but he dared not go to bed—he did not dare to go into his bed-room. Agnes was there, waiting for him. If he pushed open that door behind him and went in, he would see her, as he had often seen her, lying propped with pillows, reading “*Thomas à Kempis*.”

No, no, he had forgotten; she was dead, and his order of release lay on the floor. But yet she was still there—he was sure of it. She was quite cold and still, with a bandage round her

chin and weights closing her eyes, but if he went in and stood by her she would know he was there, and perhaps the dead hand would beckon—beckon to the husband who had been so far from her in her hour of death.

The terror grew on him, till with an effort he changed his place and sat facing the door, waiting for the shrouded figure behind it to come in search of him. Then, slowly the feeling passed. Agnes lay dead in England—he knew that; but as she died she had remembered him and called for him. She knew now that he was not there, the dead hands were feeling for him, the weighted eyelids were striving to open and look for him. O God! perhaps she was not dead—perhaps she lay in a trance from which she would recover.

Hark! was she calling him? He fancied he heard a whispered "Fred! Fred!" The throbbing of his pulses seemed to him a voice repeating his name, "Fred, Fred, Fred, Fred, Fred, Fred," again and again, first in a whisper, then louder and louder till the whole room rang with the sound, and he wondered why the man who slept across the passage did not come to ask what the noise was.

The lamp flickered and burnt out, and the dawn began to break, still he could not go into the room where his bed was. His wild terror had gone, but he felt that now on his bed was a deep mark, where a corpse had lain and been removed. He flung himself on a small hard sofa, and presently fell into an uneasy sleep. In his dreams he stooped to kiss Eva, and found Agnes' thin bony face pressed against his; he was watching by a corpse that had Eva's face, but the hand he held was Agnes'. Eva was calling him, crying for him to come to her, but Agnes' hard cold arms drew him away and kept him fast. Agnes was not dead—it was all a mistake. She had grown quite well again, and he must go back and live with her, tormented by the knowledge he had deceived Eva. These and wilder dreams haunted him, till his bearer came in, and woke him with a clatter of furniture.

The man picked up the telegram from the floor, and gave it to him. Hewden felt that Eva must be told the news, but he was incapable of writing, and shrank from the thought of waiting and telling her by word of mouth. Finally, in spite of the earliness of the hour, he

enclosed the telegram in an envelope, addressed it to Eva, and sent it to Tregarven Cottage. She would understand it without an explanation from him. Then he took off the tumbled fancy dress, and slept soundly till late in the day.

It was about noon when Mrs. Trent went into Eva's room with a letter in her hand, a very stern look on her face. Eva's behavior, at the ball had started and pained her, and this letter from Hewden, coming so early the next morning, made her uneasy. She now remembered many trifles that had not struck her at the time, and she was troubled by the thought that she had rather neglected her youngest daughter; but this very feeling inclined her to be exceedingly severe with Eva. Since eight o'clock she had been anxious and worried, longing to open the thick, square envelope, and yet not doing so. Three or four times she went to look at Eva, but the girl was sleeping so deeply that she had not roused her, and slipped gently away again. Now, it was nearly twelve o'clock and she decided to wake her.

Eva had been too tired to plait her hair the night before, and it lay round her in tangled



waves, heating cheeks that were flushed with sleep ; half her face was hidden in the pillow, and she looked like a lovely child. Her mother sat down and looked at her, till her steady gaze pierced through Eva's dreams ; she turned uneasily, moaned a little, and at last woke with a start.

"O mother! you frightened me so! I do hate to be stared awake when I am asleep."

"It is time that you should wake now, and this note has come for you."

Eva opened it quickly and drew out the telegram, which she read at a glance, then finding no note, no word from Hewden with it, she hid her eyes in the pillow, saying, "Oh, he might have written to me."

Mrs. Trent, who was thoroughly startled, took the telegram from her hand, and read it aloud : "Your wife died painlessly at five this evening." "Eva, what does this mean? There must be some mistake. Mr. Hewden could never have meant to send you this."

"Please, don't speak to me," said a very muffled voice from the pillow.

"I must speak to you! I insist on understanding this! Your behavior last night would

have forced me to speak to you in any case, and now this needs an explanation. Did you know Mr. Hewden was married ? ”

“ Oh, yes, he told me long ago.”

“ Why did you never tell me ? ”

“ Don’t be angry with me,” said poor Eva ; I wanted to tell you, I longed to tell you, mother, dear—I hated not to be able to—but it was all so uncomfortable, and I could not.”

“ My child, I don’t understand you at all. I am very much puzzled, and you must be frank with me.”

“ It’s so hard to tell ; but, of course, there is no secret now, so he can’t mind my speaking,” said the girl, nervously clasping and unclasping her hands. “ You know that Fred—I mean Mr. Hewden—has had a most miserable thing happen to him, and he naturally did not like to tell it to everybody ; but he told me, and it was all his secret first—not mine a bit.”

“ You must tell me all about it now.”

“ I will, mother ; I’m trying to. It was this : He married a woman he did not care for in the very least, when he was quite young ; he had to marry her, and then a most awful thing happened. She got ill, so ill that after a time she

went mad, really mad, and had to be taken care of and shut up. Wasn't it terrible for him? He hated England after that, and so he travelled all over the world, but he never loved her, he hasn't seen her for two years, I think, and then, and then——"

"Go on, and don't try to prevaricate," said Mrs. Trent, beginning to understand.

"Oh, don't speak like that; don't look like that; I haven't done anything wrong," cried Eva. She was longing to put her arms round her mother, and tell the rest of her story with her face hidden; but Mrs. Trent moved away from her.

"Go on, and tell me the truth," she said again.

"I don't quite know how I ought to say it, but he said he never knew what love was till he met me," said the girl with desperate quickness, and her cheeks flushed and burning, "and would I promise, when, after—she was very, very ill, you know, and could only live a few weeks, that I would——Oh, you know what I mean," and she broke down and tried to stifle her sobs in the pillow.

"Eva, I can hardly force myself to believe

this! Do you really mean to tell me that you have been deceiving me, deliberately deceiving me for months—it has been for months, I suppose—and worse still, that you have entered into a secret understanding with a married man, to marry him as soon as his unfortunate wife died?”

“It never seemed as wicked as that,” sobbed Eva.

“I do not know how it could have seemed otherwise to you; it is incredible to me that one of my daughters, whom I would have trusted under any circumstances, should have been so deceitful and worse than deceitful.”

She waited for a reply, but Eva was crying too much to speak, and Mrs. Trent went away in search of her other daughter.

May was in the nursery, taking off her baby's frock and socks in preparation for its midday sleep. She held it up to her mother, but for once the baby's most faithful worshipper did not notice the tiny outstretched hands.

“Put her down, May, and listen to me. I want your whole attention,” and standing by the cot while its little occupant cooed and gurgled unheeded, Mrs. Trent told her story.

"I can hardly believe that Eva, my Eva, who always seemed so frank and open-hearted, could have deceived us and kept this important matter secret from us: I shall never be able to trust anybody again," she said at the end.

"Poor little Eva!" said May. "She is to blame undoubtedly, but it is not all her fault. She is so young, not nineteen yet, and, of course, Mr. Hewden made everything seem plausible and natural to her; she never saw how horrible it was to wait and hope for that poor creature's death; she could not have realized it. You should be angry with him, mother—not with her."

"There is another thing that grieves me," said Mrs. Trent, with tears in her eyes. "If she insists on marrying this man, what sort of a husband will he be? If he can be so heartless once, there is no reason he should not be again. But, to put that aside, if only Eva had trusted me, and not been so secretive and deceitful."

She bent over the cot to hide her face, but May saw more than one tear fall near the innocent fluffy head, on its little pillow; she had never seen her mother so moved, and was at a

loss how to comfort her; leaving her alone seemed almost best.

"Will you stay with baby while I go to Eva?" she said. "Perhaps you may have misunderstood her, or she you."

Eva was crying with the passionate despair of a child who only feels the misery of the moment. Do you remember how it felt to be naughty and to be punished for it when one was seven years old? Ah, the child's grief can be very bitter; we neither reason nor hope when we are seven years old. We have done wrong, and those supreme powers—the grown-up-people—are angry with us; we sit on the floor crying, while happy children, far removed from us because they are good, play in the dear green garden, and we are all alone. The dolls are wax and rags, and the soldiers are painted tin, and there is no sympathy to be gained from them. Our agony lasts a few minutes, and then we are kissed and forgiven. But how real it is!

Eva, childish in many respects, felt as though her fault could never be forgotten, as though death was the only means of effacing it, and as though that escape would be welcome. She

was too miserable to hear May's light step ; the first she knew was that her sister's cool face was pressed against her flushed one, and she had no reproaches to dread from her.

"But, May, has mother told you?" she asked anxiously, when she was a little calmer. "Do you know why I am so wretched, or shall you scold me, too, when you do know?"

"Yes, dear, of course, I know. I've come to talk to you about it. Mother is very grieved. Oh, my dear little Evie, why couldn't you have told her at once, or told me at any rate? It troubles her more than you can guess to think how secret you have kept this."

"I know, but I have felt thoroughly put apart from you both this season—you have been so different to me this year. May, you know you have. That time I stayed with you at Maidanpore I could have told you anything in the world, and I did so look forward to your coming up here, and the talks we'd have; and when you came you were different somehow, and kept away from me. Mother was always with you and the baby, and I couldn't help feeling left out, and as if what I did only mattered to myself—don't you see?"

May was silent, thinking that the consequences of any one action never seemed to end : every spoken word vibrates through space for ever, and the results of the one action in her life, for which she was really responsible, were still before her, causing her sister's unhappiness as well as her own. It was a far-fetched conclusion, but the connection was clear to her. Had she not married Anstruther, the painful scene at Maidanpore, which had estranged them, all unknown to Eva, would not have occurred, she would still have possessed her sister's complete love and confidence, and the whole of this pain would have been spared. But it was *kismet*. While human beings live and love, it is impossible for one to suffer alone ; like an electric shock passing through clasped hands, the current of pain passes through one and affects another.

"How did I ever offend you, May, dear ? Do tell me ?" begged Eva.

"It was not your fault, darling ; you never did anything. I have been to blame, but you must forgive me for that, and I will help you now in every way that I can. Tell me more of



how this came to be; I must write to father about it, and I don't understand it yet."

"I don't know what to tell you. It got to feel perfectly natural and right, though I was wretched sometimes, and I am quite sure it will come right in the end, because I do love him so," said Eva simply.

May sighed, and felt that she envied her for her power of loving.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## A PARTING.

"I have but one rose in the world,  
And my one rose is drooping ;  
And oh ! when my one rose is dead,  
There will be thorns for stooping."

C. ROSETTI.

A FEW weeks' time made a great difference in Mrs. Trent's views about Eva's behavior ; she forgot the shock it had given her, and began to see some advantages in the situation. They were not to think of being married for at least a year, but really, now that she could consider the matter, Mr. Hewden was unusually nice, and exceptionally well off. She was as anxious to see one of her daughters with "a place at home," as ever Mrs. Cracroft had been, and this blessing had come to her without being sought for.

The grass had not taken root on Agnes Hewden's grave, before her life and death were carefully ignored and never mentioned by her

husband and the Trents. Eva's engagement had not been formally given out, but every one seemed to know it, and supposed that her youth was the reason of the year's delay. She is very young, and Mrs. Trent is very sensible," was their verdict.

Madge Leslie, who was to be married in the spring, was loud in her regrets that she and Eva could not have a double wedding, for not even to her had Eva confided the real state of the case; she was sure Madge would not understand it, or take the right view of it.

Ellis' poverty had no terrors for Madge, who, as she said, had "been poor all her life and would't understand a change;" in the last few months he had sold his racing ponies and paid all his debts, and she was ready to make pretty the smallest little house, and lead a happy life therein.

Brian Boru, and Malachi-with-the-Collar-o'-Gold—her horse and dog, which she counted among the necessities of life—were to be her only dowry, and she decided her trousseau was to consist entirely of riding habits, because everything else it was so easy to make for oneself. May used to sit listening while the two

girls talked together, and the joylessness of her own life was more and more borne in upon her. But the fault was chiefly with herself, she thought. She had not the gift of loving—except, indeed, loving her baby, who grew dearer to her daily. She sometimes wondered whether she would have learnt to love her husband, with the love caused by propinquity and mutual interests, had it not been for Eva's visit. She tried to consider the matter in an impersonal way, and it seemed to her that she was vindictive, and set too much importance on what was long since over; but still the memory of her husband's voice, when he said, "Before God, if you are unkind to Eva, I will never speak to you again," was painfully vivid. A desire to know how marriage affected other people led her to read a large number of novels, but they did not help her. Many of them began with a loveless marriage, but she could not sympathize with the heroines for long: they all fell in love, finally, sometimes with their own husbands, sometimes with another woman's husband, or an unmarried man; but the fact remained, they did fall in love, and she felt she could not. She noticed other men, but did not

wish to change Percy for any one of them; the fault was in her more than in him, and she did not know how it was to be remedied. No, there was no remedy, only she must realize that her life needed more patience, more unflinching good temper from her, than that of a happier woman. Little May was her one comfort and treasure, but she must think less of the child and more of its father. It would be impossible for her ever to neglect her baby, it filled her thoughts far too much for that, but she knew it would be very easily possible for her to fail to give her husband the care and attention which he had a right to expect. As the time for their meeting drew near, she tried to analyse her feelings. She was fond of him, in a way, she looked forward to seeing him again, yet the thought of the winter and the long dull evenings that must be passed alone with him, made her yawn in anticipation. They could not learn to understand each other; she often did not speak to escape having to explain the meaning of her remark to him, and though she would gladly have tried to interest herself in the details of his daily work, he seldom spoke of it. One of their evenings alone together

shortly before she came to the hills, rose in May's mind as typical. Anstruther considered it waste of time to go to bed early, though he often fell asleep in his chair, and two-and-a-half weary hours were to be passed until half-past eleven.

"Shall we play chess this evening, Percy?" she asked, as soon as his cheroot was lighted, knowing that he expected her to do so.

She was not a good player, and considered chess as something between penance and torture, and after some twenty minutes the game ended in a an ignominious fool's mate—which sometimes pleased her husband, if he happened to be in a good temper, but generally vexed him.

"I think you've been trying to lose the game," he said, sharply; "put the board away if you can't play better than that."

"I am hopelessly stupid about it, I know," said May, putting the chessmen back in their box; "but I really tried, and I do so wish I could play properly, Shall we have a game of draughts?"

"No, thank you; I have no desire to feel ten years old."

"Bezique, then, or backgammon?"

"No, no; whist and chess are the only games I care for, as you know."

"What a pity that we can't play whist with double dummy, then; only with me it would be a case of triple dummy, I am afraid."

"Yes, indeed, it would."

There was a long pause. May took up the piece of work she was doing, smocking a little silk frock for the baby.

"Why on earth do you ruin your eyes doing that sort of thing?" said her husband, suddenly; "surely the *dhirsie* would do it twice as well. I should like to know whatever is the use of my keeping a *dhirsie* for you, if you are always toiling over sewing?"

"He has plenty to do, and this is really only embroidery and play work; I like making baby's frocks pretty."

"Yes, everything for the dear baby, of course," and he laughed rather harshly. "I suppose you have never taken the trouble to notice that every handkerchief I possess is in rags; that doesn't concern you, naturally, as they are only mine."

"I got you a dozen new ones last week," said his wife quietly.

"Oh, did you! I am both surprised and grateful. Who hemmed them—you or the *dhirsie*?"

"They were hemmed when I bought them."

"That was foolish! Those ready-made things never wear well; however, of course I can't expect you or the *dhirsie* to spare an hour's time from the child's clothes."

"The hems will last quite as long as the *dhobie* will allow the handkerchiefs themselves to last."

Another long pause, broken again by Anstruther. "I think you might try to be a little brighter, May. You never seem to wish to be amusing; you haven't seen me all day; surely there must be something to tell me?"

Stimulated by a fretful sound in his voice, May repeated such scraps of news as had come in her way, and told a little story about Mrs. McTartan's latest encounter with her cook, rather brightly. He interrupted her, saying, "That's enough about that old woman; I do hope to goodness you are not growing into a gossip."



May kept herself from answering. Anstruther threw away his cheroot and lay back in his chair, and in a few minutes she heard he had fallen asleep as usual.

She got up and looked at him. His head had dropped back till he was very red in the face, his mouth was open, and for so small a man he certainly snored very loudly. She arranged a cushion behind his neck, and went to kneel by her baby's cot and hide her hot wet eyes in its white cover.

The memory of such evenings as this made her dread the winter, but she meant to try, with all her heart, to be more of a companion to him, and he had promised her a piano as a Christmas present ; surely, with her baby and music she could not be very unhappy.

Anstruther came up to Simla to fetch his wife, and his kindness in taking this long journey for her sake appealed to her strongly, until she learnt his reason for doing it.

He did not get in till late in the evening, and she took him to see baby, so deeply asleep that she did not feel her father's kiss ; however, this was very lightly and gingerly given, for he

was afraid of her, always expecting her to shriek at any minute.

"Hasn't she improved?" said May. "Just look how her hair has grown, and it is beginning to curl, too, and getting quite long. I used to hope she would have fair hair, but I don't think she will now; however, we are both dark, so I suppose I mustn't expect it. I wish she would wake up just for a minute, I want you to see her eyes, Percy—they are not bright blue, now; I think they mean to be grey, like yours."

"Don't wake her, for goodness' sake," said Anstruther, turning away and sitting down by the fire.

May carefully drew the covering over a little dimpled arm, and with a half sigh knelt on the floor near his chair.

"You look so pale, Percy; is it the effect of the journey, or the hot weather, or both? I used to feel so horribly selfish up here in the cool, while you were toiling all alone in the heat, my poor boy."

She leant against him as she spoke, with her arm round his neck in an unusually caressing way, and she was very conscious that the smell of stale tobacco hung about him.

"Well, you are not looking particularly strong yourself, little woman."

"Percy, what a shame! You told me the first thing of all this very evening, that you had never seen me looking better."

"I meant prettier—I had forgotten how very pretty you are. But you look delicate all the same."

"There can be no reason for it, except, perhaps, too much idleness. I have had so little to do; it will be different when I have the ways of my household to look to."

"I shall be very glad when we can settle down again, dear; but the nuisance of it is, my plans are all upside down, and I don't know yet where we shall spend the winter."

"But we shall go to Maidanpore to begin with, I suppose."

"Well, no; that's what I wanted to talk to you about. I have to go into camp for a month or six weeks."

"Whereabouts?"

"Umritza direction, at least Umritza is the place I shall start from, so you see it would be better for us to stop there on the way down."

"Yes, of course it would. But, Percy, isn't

this an unhealthy time of year to take a baby into camp?"

"Yes, I never thought of your bringing the little one; she would be a great deal of trouble, and it would be dangerous for her."

"Then you intend that she and I should go to Maidanpore and wait there for you?" asked May, who found it impossible to imagine even a few days' separation from her baby.

"No; I think a few weeks in camp would do you a great deal of good, darling—the life is very healthy for a grown-up person, and there would be nothing to worry you—about the house, and so on."

"But the baby? What would become of little May?" and she felt inclined to laugh at the idea of leaving her.

"I was going to suggest that you should speak to your mother about taking care of her while you are away; it would not be more than six weeks, and I know she is very fond of the little one; and you have always said the ayah is very efficient, so it would not be much trouble."

"Then you actually want me to leave my

baby for more than a month?" cried May, more tragically than she knew.

"I don't see that I am asking such a tremendous sacrifice," said her husband impatiently, getting up and beginning to walk about the room; "women do it constantly—most women do it, in fact. You have been away from me half the year for the baby's sake, and now, when I ask you to leave her, for her own good, in excellent hands, where every care will be taken of her, you cry out as if I wanted to murder her. Why, she isn't even old enough to know you, she will never miss you, and yet her claim on you is supposed to be greater than mine—than your husband's. Are you deliberately trying to anger me?"

He had worked himself into a temper, and spoke in a loud, angry voice, which reached little May through her dreams, and she stirred and whimpered; her mother hastened to sooth her, and she was soon fast asleep again.

"See, Percy, I feel sure she knows me," said May. You don't know how bright she has grown in these last two months; I can always quiet her in a minute, when she won't look at mother or the ayah."

"Very well, then, she will get to know you again all the sooner when you come back. It is the simplest thing in the world, unless you insist on making difficulties. Your mother means to stay up here until the middle of November, and we shall pass through Dreean Drear at the end of the month and can take the baby on with us then."

"But November 17th is baby's birthday—her first birthday! It will seem so hard to be away from her then."

"Nonsense, dear. What can it matter about a birthday while the child is so young?"

"I very much doubt if mother will undertake such a charge," said poor May, trying to think of some serious objection to his plan; "it would be a fearful responsibility, it hardly seems fair to ask her."

"I can settle all that, if you will only take a sensible view of it."

She could have replied with a torrent of words telling him how cruel and unnecessary she considered this separation; her husband had done without her for nearly six months, and could surely bear her absence for a few weeks more. It was not as though they were

close companions. She knew what the days would be like; she had been into camp with him soon after they were married, and well remembered the long days she had spent alone, while he was working, and the dreary evenings when he was too tired to do anything but fall asleep a few minutes after dinner. What comfort or pleasure could her society be to him under these circumstances? And yet for this she was to leave her baby, who had never been away from her for more than a few hours during the whole of its little life. It seemed to her that her husband displayed an unworthy jealousy; he asserted his rights against those of his own child, and she despised him for it. She turned to say something of all this, but suddenly checked herself. He was leaning back with a weary expression that touched her, and reminded her of her resolve to be more to him. After all, he had been working in the heat, living alone and working for her and the baby, while she had been happy and had thought of him so little. Her conscience reproached her, and she made up her mind for the sacrifice, which seemed nothing to him, and meant so very much to her. "I will

do as you wish, Percy, dear," she said quietly, "and I am sorry to have seemed unwilling, but it was a great surprise and shock to me at first, and I spoke hastily."

"Then you realize now, dear, that I need you more than the baby can, and that you and I are a little dearer to each other than that tiny thing can be," he said, and even, as he kissed her, she felt it was an effort to her not to shrink from him.

Unfortunately for her hopes, Mrs. Trent willingly undertook the care and responsibility of the baby, and three days later she was forced to leave Simla with her husband.

She never forgot the weariness of those long days in camp, while her intense yearning for her child wore her and wrought on her nerves like physical pain. Anstruther led his life apart, as before, save that he occasionally told her that this rest and freedom from worry was doing her great good, and he seemed pleased by his own thoughtfulness in arranging it. Mrs. Trent's letters were her one comfort. But there is not much for even the most loving observer to write daily about a child of one year old, and she had not a ready pen. May



begged her sister to write also, but Eva found her own affairs very absorbing, and could only send a hurried note now and again. It was an infinite relief to her when she heard the return to the plains had been accomplished without the baby catching cold; and her heart grew lighter, as she found it possible to count the days that separated her from her darling on one hand.

They were to reach Dreean Drear on December 1st; and on the 27th of November little May's ayah, when lifting a kettle off the nursery fire, upset it over her own feet, and was too severely scalded to do her work. Mrs. Trent's old ayah, Junia, and her daughter, Rudia, who waited on Eva, were willing to supply her place for two or three days; and the matter seemed simple enough.

Now Rudia was young and thoughtless, and, while taking little May for her afternoon airing, she joined a group of ayahs, and gave herself up to interesting conversation concerning the sayings and doings of their various *memsahibs*. It was a chilly evening, and she returned home at a much later hour than the one decreed by Mrs. Trent, who knew the danger of the even-

ing chill; but that lady was out, and Rudia kept her own council.

All the next day the baby seemed out of sorts and fretful, with a way of putting her hand to her throat which made Mrs. Trent uneasy; there was no improvement in her state towards evening, and two telegrams were sent to May—one to Umritza, and one to their last stopping place. Telegrams in India have an almost magic faculty of finding the people they are meant for, but in this case the first one arrived a few hours after the Anstruthers had left, and was not sent on.

The baby slept for a few hours, and woke burning with fever, moaning with thirst and pain, and coughing; the unmistakable croupy cough that mothers dread.

Mrs. Trent, who was watching by her, sent instantly for a doctor, though experience had taught her what to do, and the baby struggled for life till dawn. Her usual cry when anything troubled her, "Mam-mam-mamma" moaned constantly now, through parched blue lips, acquired a force and pathos that went to Mrs Trent's very heart; and her poor mother, more than a hundred miles away, slept uneasily,

and dreamt of some vague terror spreading out dark wings to overshadow her. Mrs. Trent and Eva did all that was possible, all that the doctor could suggest; each not daring to confess what she feared. If skill and tenderness and anxious love could have saved her, little May would have been given back safe to her mother's arms again; but her strength was unable to bear the strain. In spite of baths and stimulants and a carefully warmed and moistened atmosphere, she grew weaker and weaker, and died soon after sunrise with one last choking cry of "Mam-mam!"

Alas! for our perfect sympathies, May would have said she must have felt and heard her dying child call to her, had she been at the other end of the world, or beyond the gates of death; but at that moment her sleep had grown calm, and she was dreaming a happy dream, of meeting her baby, her darling, her little flower; while Mrs. Trent and Eva bent crying over the cot, one echoing the thought of the other, when she said, "What shall we say to May? How can we break it to her?"

## CHAPTER XVII.

## ACROSS THE SEA.

"Lost rose ! End my story !  
Dead core and dry husk,  
Departed thy glory  
And tainted thy musk.  
Night spreads her dark limbs on  
The face of the dim sun :  
So flame fades to crimson,  
And crimson to dusk."

L. GORDON.

ANSTRUTHER had been unexpectedly detained some miles from Umritza, and May, though longing to hasten on to Dreean Drear, had been forced to remain with him. When they reached Umritza, where he had a day's business, she found Mrs. Trent's telegram awaiting her ; it had been sent when there seemed to be no danger, and was only, "Come soon as possible ; baby is unwell." But it was enough to cause May a fever of anxiety.

"This has been waiting a day for me here, and who knows what may have happened meanwhile ? We must go at once, Percy."

But her husband saw no necessity for this, and pointed out that the word "unwell" must denote some very trifling ailment. His business was pressing; May had far better wait until he had discharged it, and they would go on together. But she swept his suggestions aside.

"I shall not stay away from my child one instant longer than I can help; thank Heaven I can catch the morning train and get there before five. Come when you like, Percy; stay as long as you choose; you shall not keep me here eating my heart out with suspense. You have taken me away from my darling, but no power on earth shall keep me from her now."

He was very much surprised by her vehemence, and offered no further opposition, though she seemed to him excited and irrational.

During the seven long hours, while the train went on its slow way through the flat ugly country, May had time to think, and argued away some of her fears. It was such a usual time of the year for babies to catch cold, but it could be nothing serious, and her mother's over-anxiety had caused the sending of the telegram. She must expect to find the baby looking pale, but she would tend her until she

was bright and bonny again. After all, how could any one take real care of her pet except she herself? and when they were once more together she would not let her go out of her sight. There was no one to meet her at the station, for she had not telegraphed that she was coming, and without waiting to claim her luggage, she drove to the house.

The verandahs were deserted, and she felt relieved that baby was not allowed even to go into a sunny verandah while she was suffering from cold; she called, but no one heard, and without further delay she went into the room which served as a nursery. It was empty. Then baby must be better, she thought, and out for an airing. But how tidy it all was! Why were the toys put out of sight? Why was there no fire? And why should the crib have no blankets, only a sheet drawn over the mattress? She felt giddy and faint, and sank down on the floor, by the cot, waiting till she felt strong enough to call and find some one to ask where her baby was. A few white chrysanthemums lay on the carpet, and she picked them up, wondering why they had been

dropped there. The door opened, and Eva came in. When she saw her sister she started back, and seemed inclined to run away.

"Don't be frightened. I'm not a ghost, Evie. Didn't you expect me?" said May, getting up.

"Yes, but I didn't know you were here."

"I haven't seen anyone yet. I came in this way to see baby at once. I suppose she must be better as she is not here. Has she gone out?"

Eva turned her head away as she said, "She is not in this room; come to mother."

"It quite startled me to see the crib looking as if it hadn't been slept in, and the room feeling chilly, but then I am always nervous about the little one."

May went to Mrs. Trent's room, still holding the flowers that had fallen when her baby's coffin had been taken away, and Eva left her at the door. Then she saw that her mother was crying, and began to be anxious, but when the truth was told her, between sobs, she did not faint or cry; all her mind was bent on trying to realize it. She asked for details of her baby's death in a steady voice, and when her mother kissed her and cried over her, saying,

"My child, we must comfort each other," she suffered the embrace without the least show of response.

"Let me see her," she said presently, almost shaking herself free.

"Oh, my poor child—have I not made you understand yet what has happened?" cried Mrs. Trent.

"Yes, yes, I know. Baby is dead. But let me see her; perhaps I shall be able to realize then that I am not dreaming."

In vain they repeated in various forms of words that the baby's little body, shrined and nestled among white flowers, had been buried that morning; she could only realize the fact of death, and continued to ask to see it, very quietly, but so persistently that Mrs. Trent grew terrified, and telegraphed to Anstruther. He made an effort, cut his business short, and started by the evening train. The news of little May's death honestly grieved him, but he had not lived in the same house with the child for months, and he had always thought his wife was foolishly fond of her. It was unfortunate that she had been away from her baby when it died, but then she had been spared the grief of



seeing it in pain, and, as baby had been in such good hands, he could not feel himself in the least to blame for having separated her from it. But he was exceedingly sorry, and his heart grew very tender towards his wife as he imagined her worn out with tears : his poor, pretty May. Their baby's life had not endeared them to each other, but, surely, its death would, and he meant to be very kind to her, and make up for the loss she had suffered. When they met he would take her in his arms and comfort her till she cried herself calm on his shoulder; and after that things would be better. He seldom indulged in day dreams, having very little imagination, but, as each mile-post brought him nearer to May, he planned a happier and more united life for them, very much as she had done in the autumn.

He expected to see her the moment he reached the house; he fancied that her trouble would make her feel lonely and long for him—her child's father. But only Mrs. Trent came to meet him, and her face was very anxious and careworn.

"May will not leave the nursery, she said.  
"We cannot get her away from the cot; she

will eat nothing; she has taken no rest. I speak to her, but she does not seem to hear me, and I am sure she will make herself ill. Go in and see if you can persuade her to rest."

May was kneeling by the empty cot, neither crying nor praying. When she saw her husband she started up with a look of repulsion that staggered him, as a blow in the face would have done; but, perhaps, his coming had frightened her; she had probably not expected him so soon.

"My poor darling, how terrible this has been for you," he said, and tried to put his arm round her, but she thrust him away,

"Don't touch me—don't come near me!" she cried in a high, shrill voice. "I can't bear it! I will not bear it! You have caused all my misery, and now you pretend to want to comfort me."

"O May, my dearest, what have I done that you say this?" And his voice was almost as excited as hers.

"What have you done? You have killed my baby! But for you she would have been alive now; had I been with her, she would not have died. I would have kept my treasure

safe, shielded her safe in my arms, had you left me with her. But, no, you hated her; you were jealous of her, and so you took me away—dragged me away and left her here to die. You murdered her! It was murder, murder!—do you hear me, murder! My baby, my little precious, killed with cold. How did you get my mother to join in your plan? I used to think she loved me; but you arranged it very well just two days before I came, so I have not even a dead face to kiss, only the earth on a grave. Are you content now? But tell me why you would not let me love her. You knew she made the only happiness of my life, so you took me away and had her killed. Can you deny it? Oh, why didn't I hide from you how much I loved her! God knows, one curl from her little head was more to me than your whole body and soul have ever been. But I never deserved this punishment. My sweet, my flower, how am I to live without you?" Her voice sank into a moan, and Anstruther, who had been half dazed by her raving, remembered that she was frantic with grief, and tried again to sooth her.

"Dearest, you don't know what you are say-

ing. You are worn out. You will be ill if you do not rest; come away, come with me." To his surprise she let him lead her towards the door, but at the threshold she stopped and looked back at the cold empty room, with a face of such misery that her husband instinctively caught her close in his arms. For an instant she seemed too surprised to resist, then she wrenched herself from him, and went back to the cot.

"Listen to me," she said. "I know I am your wife; I belong to you. God help me, but my baby's grave lies between you and me for ever. You have killed her and made me hate you—remember that. If you kiss me or touch me, I will kill myself; I would rather die than live now. Go, go! don't speak to me, only go!"

She knelt again, with her face pressed into the pillow on which her child had died, and Anstruther went slowly away. That night May was raving in delirium, and for days she was racked with fever; her good constitution saved her from brain fever, but she was very ill and weak. When she recovered, the unreasonable-ness of her grief had passed away. She no

longer felt her husband and mother were cruel, or in any way to blame for her baby's death; but, though resigned, she was very miserable.

Anstruther had been obliged to go back to duty while her fever was at its height. The sight of him then had made her frantic, and though he saw by her letters that her mind had recovered its tone, he dreaded their first meeting.

The new station to which he had been transferred was a very small and dull one, and the house he took was dark and ill-contrived; he did his best, in his man's way, to make it habitable, but it was none the less a cheerless place when May came to it. She hardly noticed the bare walls and common furniture, she only thought that here was a home of hers in which she should never see her baby, and that in these dreary rooms she would sit solitary day after day. Her husband was not sure what terms they were on. She looked very pale and worn and gentle now, and he wondered if she still remembered what she had said to him over the baby's empty cot. He did not like to mention it to her, but in the evening, when she was

resting on a sofa that was harder than boards, she spoke of it.

"Percy, I am afraid that just before I was ill I talked very wildly to you and said some dreadful things. I was half mad then—you mustn't remember it."

He leant over her, saying he had forgotten it, and she must never think of it again, and with an effort she put her arm round his neck, but she did not kiss him, and after a minute the arm fell away. For some little time he sat by her, holding her head against his shoulder, trying to think that this might prove the beginning of greater tenderness and sympathy between them, but he could not long deceive himself. The weeks went on, and May seemed to grow thinner and paler each day—nothing was the matter with her, she said; but the grief, which she made no effort to conquer, won away her strength. Her husband wearied her with entreaties to take tonics and exercise and amuse herself, but, though she often rode till she almost fainted with fatigue, she never gained a good night's sleep. She had often regretted, during the first year of her married life, that her husband was not more ready with

the little attentions that go for so much in a woman's estimate of a man, but now she wished he would be less gentle, less thoughtful, less anxious to please her. It worried her to know that he tried to talk in a way that would interest her; he was careful to leave her alone as little as possible, and to be alone was the one thing she longed for ceaselessly. All her resolves to be gentle and unselfish and more of a companion to him were forgotten—the purpose and beauty of her life seemed buried with her child; it was now only a burden to be endured, and she had no hope for the future. She never looked forward to a happier time—the agony of the past and the slow misery of the present filled all her thoughts.

Before her marriage she had been religious to the extent that most young girls are; she had not outgrown the teaching of her childhood, and she was contentedly certain of Faith and Belief; but, in her time of trial, she found she could neither believe nor hope. She did not know when the change had come, she only knew that she was changed, and that prayers had become a mockery to her. What was

there left to pray for? What was the use of prayer?

Her husband's kindness touched her a little, but she was too languid and unhappy to rouse herself to respond to it: the same impulse by which one pats a dog who looks up wistfully, made her sometimes turn to him with an unasked caress, but this was all, and it was not much. If this state of affairs had lasted long, he would doubtless have grown tired of trying to comfort the pale dreary woman, who, for the time, had wept away the beauty and the freshness of her youth; but before the hot weather began the doctor decided that to go home was the only thing that would benefit her. She was quite prepared to spend the whole summer in the plains with her husband—life was so miserable that heat and discomfort mattered nothing—but the doctor spoke strongly to Anstruther of her failing health, and it was settled that she should go to England.

Mrs. Trent had been anxious to have her daughter with her at Simla again, but the thought of living in the house where she had last seen and last kissed her baby was more than May could endure. She had no special



desire to go to England ; however, Percy wished it, and it was easier to agree than to object. She was to stay with his family, whom she only knew through the medium of letters which were always a little hard and pragmatic, but she did not care : all places and people were the same to her now.

Anstruther got a week's leave and took her down to Bombay—an attention that worried her even while she felt she ought to be grateful for it.

As soon as it was definitely settled that she should go home, she was conscious of a great longing to be free and alone for a time, away from her husband's attempts to cheer and comfort her, out of hearing of his slow voice, out of sight of the half-pained, half-wistful expression of his face, to be able to feel herself unwatched and unnoticed. His affectionate care grated on her nerves dreadfully during the long journey of three days and three nights down to Bombay. Often she needed all her self-control to refrain from begging him to be quiet, and not look at her, not to persistently question her whether there was anything she wanted or would like, when it strained her voice to reply audibly

above the roar and the rattle of the train. They had no time to spend in Bombay, but went straight from the railway to the steamer.

On the tender going to the steamer, May noticed among the passengers a girl, whose pretty face was disfigured by tears, clinging to the arm of a fair-haired young man, who looked as frankly, though not as tearfully, unhappy as she did. They were evidently husband and wife, and May, who was touched by the girl's misery, was glad to find when on board that she was to share a cabin with her. Little Mrs. Graham at once told her, through her sobs, that her husband was obliged to go to Burma for at least a year, and she was going home to her people, and they had only been married eleven months. Lieutenant Graham took May aside, and in a few hasty boyish words asked her to be kind to his wife. "You see, it's very rough luck my having to go to Burma now, and Nellie ought to have gone home—she's going to her mother, you know—before this, but she would stay to see the very last of me. You'll be good to her, won't you? and don't let her fret. She's not strong, you know, and I'm

afraid she'll be very unhappy, poor little woman.'

May willingly promised to do her best to cheer the forlorn little wife, whom she envied for loving her husband so thoroughly, and for the welcome that was waiting her in England.

The bell rang for those who were not passengers to go back to the tender, and May saw Nellie Graham, caught up almost off her little feet, in her husband's arms; perhaps it was merely imitation, or perhaps some worthier feeling, that made her cling to Anstruther more tenderly than she had ever done before.

"Take care of yourself, darling," he said, "and make haste to get strong again. Mind you write me long letters every week and tell me every scrap of news. Cheer up, and we will have a happy time together when I come home. God bless you, my darling; good-bye, good-bye."

May tried to speak, but could think of nothing; though she had intended to thank him for the kindness of the last few months, no words came.

"God bless you," she repeated. "Good-bye, Percy."

He drew back and looked at her. She was pale, but the grief that dimmed his eyes was not reflected in hers, and dropping her hands he went towards the gangway, hearing as he passed, Mrs. Graham's last words to her husband: "Darling, I can't bear it, it's too hard. How am I to live away from you?"

Looking at Graham's boyish face, he wondered what he had done to deserve such love, and why he himself had failed so utterly to win it.

The tender moved off, and May, calm and dry-eyed, seeing little Mrs. Graham blind with tears, groping helplessly for the bulwark, put an arm round her and encouraged her to make an attempt to smile and wave her handkerchief; and it seemed to Anstruther that, had she ever cared for him, she would have had no thoughts for a stranger in their moment of parting.

That evening May sat on deck looking across the sea towards the land she had left, and thinking more of her child's grave than of her husband, till Mrs. Graham was half-frightened by her quiet face.

"I don't believe you are human!" she said

suddenly. "You haven't cried once. When shall you see your husband again?"

"Next year," said May, wondering if Eva would remember to take white roses to that little grave.

"You say that as though it were next month. But of course, it's better for you: he won't have to run the risks that Allen will. You can't be as wretched as I am."

"You are both happy and fortunate, if you only knew it," said May; but the girl had turned away sobbing, and did not hear her.

May did not care to make friends with her fellow-passengers. The ship was crowded, but she rarely spoke to anyone except Nellie Graham, who divided her time between writing long letters to Burma and talking to May. At first May listened to her half wearily, then she grew interested, and, with a very little encouragement, the girl told all her simple story, and seemed to find comfort in talking with singular frankness about her husband and herself. It came as a revelation to May. She had never known the little quarrels that have no bitterness in them, the teasing words that carry no sting, the small economies that end in some one

magnificent extravagance, the trifling jokes and catch phrases, so dear to two, so meaningless to any third, the constantly-recurring little satisfactions of every day—mere nothings in themselves, yet all links of a very strong chain.

She had looked upon a really sympathetic marriage as a kind of high heaven which she had no wings to fly to, and feeling this she had not tried to raise herself to it by the little cares and little kindnesses which were within her power. Was it possible that she had expected too much and given too little! Nellie Graham loved her husband dearly, yet May could see from her descriptions that he had a bad temper, and that there were lapses of sympathy between them almost as great as those that had sundered her from Anstruther—yet they were happy and well content.

As she grew stronger, her morbid grief for her child's death passed away, leaving only a gentle sorrow, and for the first time she began to realize how her behavior must have affected her husband. The mischief caused by Eva's visit shrank into insignificance, and she was forced to recognize that it had been almost a

satisfaction to her to remember what should have been forgotten long ago.

She seemed to herself to have been meanly unforgiving, actuated by petty spite ; her husband might easily have thought so, and his behavior, regarded in this light, had been very gentle and forbearing. Her own conduct, measured by the standard of her ideal, proved lamentably wanting. She had imagined her hopes and aspirations superior to those of other women, but how utterly they had failed. She had held out her hands to the highest, only to find that the lowest was far above her reach. It was the old story of good undone, and gifts misspent, and vain resolutions, and she saw there had been a kind of disdain in her mind, which now grieved her as the commission of an actual sin might have done. Life had not given her its best, so she had refused to see any good in what she had, feeling even a kind of perverted pleasure in mourning over the ruins of her happiness, though she had not given a finger-touch to try and save it from ruin.

The evening before they reached Plymouth was bitterly cold, and May, after forbidding Mrs. Graham to run the chances of a chill, sat





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